



OF BEING DISPERSED  
SIMONE WHITE

## Of Being Dispersed

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Simone White

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*sister, brother, husband*



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Then I began to hear the call of Los Angeles.  
The best rooms in the apartment faced North.  
My husband tried to put me where I could entertain  
winter light, the lavender paint-idea, the sectional  
porn poured in from design blogs. Well,  
it was no use. Los Angeles was on my face;

it was hot and harmless.

Before I burned up and rolled away,  
black-ass tumbleweed, as had happened so many times  
in dreams that year, it was important that I get there  
or get some information my papa was trying to get across,  
like, GO TO LOS ANGELES

(where dead negroes can't get in your house).

Yeah.

It has been suggested that I am insufficiently open  
to the possible presence of occult phenomena  
on this earth. Voices of the dead, which I just told you  
come around/irritate me, rock kinetics,

shamans and people who clear auras,

I do not deal in. Not because they are not real,  
but because they are, I do not deal in them.

Los Angeles of the hidden garden, of the carved-up  
starlet, acres of strange dick, items  
of unclear provenance and arbitrary value.

There is a hotel in West Hollywood, quite near  
the bungalow of an old friend who can make shoes  
out of wood and boiled wool, but that is just  
an example of what she can do. I would like  
to take a room in this hotel for weeks on end  
and pretend to be dead. I should drink champagne

and refuse help, then move to another hotel. Perhaps,  
the Beverly Hills.

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## C o m m e n t

*‘Avant le circonflexe, on a cru que tous l’écriture était écrit dans la langue du réflexion. Thus, the language I learned to speak at birth comments upon relative inscription.’*

Commentary, first mode of elaboration, before inquiry, people just rapping in caves.

In feelings of and for total loss, the fullness of maturity mauled and harassed me. In my marriage and with my mother, there was truly no celebration of my imaginary self, still caterwauling in the way-behind.

The subways could be anywhere because a state of unhearingness prevails there; unless there is an emergency, and people begin to speak.

From the Old French *comment* and before that the Latin for “invention, contrivance, enthymeme.” Speech from or with *mens*: Speech that has wishes, wishing to be more than sound; that non-talk for which the poetic so painfully hopes.

Also, commend. I commend to you a period of abstinence. Preferably from drink. I eked out the most moderate drunkenness for many lonely days. I poured thimblefuls of white wine and still staggered under the same motherfucker of a headache. My liver was tender, very tender. I wanted to say, “The principle of this body is to put out. Invagination is a cosmic scam!”



*You have a complicated way of speaking.*

This chicken store was not yet operational. Its nice grey sign attempted a ridiculous balance between [come hither] and [it doesn't so much matter whether you come or not]. I know what a chicken is, though. What is that talent called, with fonts? Because fried chicken is a wholesome snack, I command you:

*Get outta here, nigga! Kiss my black ass! "Discours qui font rire."*

*Hot Bird. Hot Bird. Hot Bird.* Every few miles on the circuit: one need not starve to death this evening. Lemon yellow and red, yolk and hen, rolled in red dirt.

My relationship to chicken is uncomplicated.

Your sentences trail off into muttering when your nerves get the better of you. Your thigh becomes frantic, your palm presses down on it as if in secret, but everyone can see your thigh, which is not connected to your palm but to your hip and the ball of your foot. Eyeballs, tongue, your whole leg kicks out against the piece you would say. I see how patience is a kind of caress. Let history be borne out in stutters, in mania and grappling.

Awash in delay forever, I had wished for it, and made it so. What was true was also filthy, was surgical. I had the fingers for it.

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## Of Being Dispersed



## W a t e r s

as it were in the blood

availed of ability to ride

it could be on horseback the way you appear most  
regular

not to be ridden I understand

the necessarily imagined whip

burdens banging against both flanks                      your loose

neglected mad horse someone eventually shoots

in the name of most gentle barbarity

what a terrible swimmer you were

now your son is no swimmer dude seriously

many times his little body was stuck on me

a barnacle    or hung little albatross

apologize never  
and always claw my back

waters roll off me

they ride me or I ride them      it is a complexity

whether one is being

done for or doing in your element

## P e s t i l e n t

Whereabouts      my brother      somewhere

in night sweat

pestilent learned most inside of inside?

Whereabouts his manner    having disappeared

returns awash.

Never and always my brother

renews twoness    ungendered forms

uninterviewed.

- :      Ocean Parkway and what?
- :      The bar there, it takes my dog Wrath.
- :      Riff or to float you?
- :      W-R-A-T-H. Duh.



: My Honeymoon.  
The Surfers.

: Turpentine won't erase your greasy hopes  
: or daily refusal to stand up on the sea.  
Impossibility is for drunks.  
: Stand up! Stand up on the sea.  
: Just this morning hundreds, barefoot, rose,  
: to walk on water as testimony.  
: Our will to grip and destroy the physical laws;  
: it is the essence of navigation,  
: also of not drowning. You are so deeply lazy.  
: Everyone makes me work ungodly  
: hard to keep him with me.

## Metaphor for the Changing Season

All I was thinking or would ever think was happening in a closet. I could never be joined there by anyone but you. You and you and I were all there was. The enfolding thing, to pulsate. Parts broke off and spun away. We were capsular or corpuscular in terms both of destiny and lack of destination. Parts broke off and I looked to you to see if thoughts had been had by anybody.

: Can I meet you at Supreme?  
:  
: I can't meet you at Supreme?  
: I can work the subway and meet you at Supreme.

## Actionary

Who can give an account of occasions

Can mechanized description so falter

Can move toward gesture to scissor the outline

Each to enable a series of seconds breaking or burning

Can undo the work of a million years of human love

if I curse you just right

## Song Cave

I say an imprint of bones

inked-up at the bottom of the body

someone complains of barrenness

she is spread apart marks the progress of feminine disease

echolocate why don't you joints of foot

and ankle which

bend the knee which

creaks does your pelvis sigh also

to bend

press your black fanning bones into fabric receive an evidence

entire and open of hinge,

so as not to embarrass my comrades    I suppress an encounter with the grand  
domestic fantasy of loft living    on the vestigial tail of Queens                    up five stories  
slatted blinds    rebuke the ideal life one thinks    one is living in the trash stream

oh a patch of lawn            if that is this    municipal rug of blade and clod    laid-by  
carelessly

late-Robert Moses assails us with so many new objects    one thinks    oh a crescent  
moon                    and it is nothing but onramp                    beheld improperly

many thousands of feathers    known to me only as the feathers of a quill pen    more  
likely    that image of feather    on Litia's forearm germinates  
to become also the pattern of feathers on silk leggings we admire

these feathers            I have hung on the white van of our progressive imagination    have  
made myself    a driverless totem                    let us not then parade barf-bag wisdoms

disrespecting our vision like that

only to discover a previous triangulation error had led away after all  
from restful hormone vacation            that in the dollar van was only lust  
for I was between the naked thighs of a middle-aged star of the silver screen  
towed in the wake of his walking            where I confirmed the athletic socks he wore  
as in fact synthetic            such as are necessary  
for serious work

my sister was a blue goddess bureaucrat    whose strict standard governed our intricate  
course    patterned movements unapproved by her were halted            I felt my  
husband's hand  
on my knee            only to become            doubly paranoid

clearly the screw was me            but the jaws were multiple            more at least than two  
I dangled lonely in the van            beneath the scrotum of Jeff Daniels

it is the cause my soul

insurgent voltage shot through me at some depth            like the charge of an egg dropt  
you have the feel for it so much            in its power you grow stupider until who knows when  
I am so tired

Lord of these pains            call me a woman to brush me all over            rest me  
from any who would take my blood            even though

I put my vein out like a ho

## Its Principal Theorist

Palsy filled up my view of what happened  
not of ease where there is no ease  
how best to defend the soft limb  
shorn vertebrae oh to fold and fall down  
on rich baby sweatpants

## W i n d r i m

To Windrim or sycamore

rustle cicada or bark and to Wayne

to rustle and psos and psos to Belmont and Germantown hills  
hills as to nearer Plateau as to Central and whisper wall Indian

summer to sleeves or the sleeveless groin as to forward

and dog shit and Cliveden to Wieland the whispering creek

as to Windrim

or mounting as Chestnut to backslid

the Juniper Schuylkill

to boulder the pound to clover mite

vernal or rake as to tendon

exhaust of to Windrim and spare Wissahickon

of interval granite of peppers of salt-meat of bread

viney cicada of futures and snowdrift and headlit black sycamore

peel as to epic and Eakins to whisper to row

and rape and Windrim to six and of rape and of rocks and of East

the Ursa the middle or buckle and Olney

of hat

as stone circuit to Windrim or edge as to pace

as to vise the falls



## Some Creek

One ear to this singing black boulder, lipping  
a gravitational problem way more serious  
when autumn's considered essentially fallen  
a collapsed situation, the bodies all scrambling up rocks  
absent whole sides of themselves  
they had left on the ground, so heaving

grotesque hulks that trailed seeds that made the lips black  
thus reminded of products of miscegenation, that's spring  
though, one day to climb up and break  
that wretched Indian statue in the woods  
the want of true granite only keeps me  
from guilty if nigger-lipped pleasures.

## They Say They Can Fill Me Up with a Baby

We have the same President today as yesterday  
and what is easier than staying the same?  
Teaching Reznikoff I cry and make myself  
the spectacle I say most certainly I am not.  
Say, *want to be with*, say Buddha  
or don't say nothing for which, nothing.  
No matter how much it costs to afford  
an even million, mother can afford it  
yet she does not seem to understand  
equivalence, doctoris comma juris et  
medicinae doctor and also this other one.  
When we talk about literacy there cannot be  
one without concessions. Like,  
how can this cat have no smell at all?  
Something of boxwood and piss must be true  
or all childhood was a lie  
in the name of bowdlerized peace, black peace.





/

If violence is the unit of joblessness  
then bang down your wrist for young mothers  
like Emerson covered in concrete  
If the man having only just shit his pants  
at W4th Street did the gentlest shuffle  
in his own liquid shit  
versus my unsullied pants  
with the hole large enough for the mosquito  
to get in and bite

then what am I reporting here? I am not Wordsworth  
this poem begins with the death of Erica Johnson  
remembers a man with a book on boats  
reflects on how to compose such a poem  
on covetousness which might be a sin  
returns to blue boats and bespoke  
that is its structure

/

a pox of urges  
one redraws the face of the aforementioned  
gentleman        we wash him with our nipples

if you have not heard your dance music equal  
then do not speak if you do not know the Neptunes  
stop talking                                cut my eye  
again    for heaviness  
that break a glass dick table

I peek out        separately from Erica Johnson  
though the beacon of murmur things  
flash me girl

## Was a Flat Breast Plate

When everyone was moving to Prague  
When everyone was moving to Fort Greene  
Was colored and that was complete  
Reversal of the circumstance of circumference

Encircled The circle was of being dispersed  
Of trying to live  
Was Beckett universe a place  
Wasn't no one moving there

Was the bresaola to come with from (not Italy)  
The colonial last armored location  
Was sliding vertically along the hard  
Front of economic history

Was the Starchild of Dawoud Bey,  
Glenn Ligon & Mickalene Thomas

Regarding sweet milk and hellfire  
as passable instances of mimesis  
it could be said the takedown  
was underway its long tooth descending  
immemorially when you sit  
let it not be with roast beast  
nor shall Tropicalia disgrace  
twenty pounds of lean muscle  
Ali never looked better in shades



Was Old Lion, or,  
On the Camino Trail

Lourdes loves a tight high box, a falsetto word, costs very little, is almost free. Lourdes cannot imagine what to do with black leather pants that cost what she costs for four or five years. That is for one pair. Lourdes doesn't care that another person could put them on, but they wouldn't fit. Cat Power's pubes would stand up out of these pants if Richard Avedon were to photograph her from the grave, one day.

It's raw to have no hobbies except chasing objects small enough to pick up and carry in your mouth. Adorno says it is not bourgeois. It is never all that clear whether Adorno is cursing a thing or what, but Lourdes can never be bourgeois or want pants. The form of our togetherness forbids her from spending money. Getting anything, getting freedom or pants, costs money.

Lourdes reminds me of the pilgrims. Gloriana—was dead, a generation of her people sagged into the grave before the action began, perished on the rocks before the evolutionary whoosh

of fleet violence. It was Lourdes or them. Choose Lourdes. To worship, to smooth over wrinkles, to light candles, to stroke, to be unable to separate, to walk without water toward, to faint, to be falsely pregnant, and immured, to bite and be bled, to be strait-jacketed, to sanctify, to accidentally kill with fire, to make rich to confound these predators. All this from Lourdes, to her miracle as alleged icon of late maturity.

## A Monkey Could do This

at the very first moment in Baltimore there was a thud  
it was my great grandmother coming back to earth

(levitate, negro

you could do it just breathe)

up to my chin in what I do not deserve  
certainly there is a limit to the utility of Jesus

watch how I am to the touch  
flaming off a rifle barrel

wherein I signal inspiration  
in wound-up sclera and a ferocious cannonball  
toward the rapt attention of the congregants

and raise up in testimony over this here

## You and Me are Not Friends, OK?

With “barbecue” in one ear and “chips” in the other, that is how  
a goddess comes  
with one calf cramped and a finger up her ass; a goddess comes  
for twenty minutes

only when the seventh record has been turned over, convinced  
that laboring  
so closely over your face will kill you in a minute, does she  
relieve herself

with a huffed and casual motherfuck.

The probity of her pussy satisfies all curiosities. “Whatever,  
baby—let’s try it.”

Doritos might be a distraction but don’t be confused about how  
they work: you gotta eat.

I said this. I did this, without pseudonym,

S

At this point, the say back's confused as to sources  
a tall Chinese butch at a tacky party  
is being admired for neat bigness and a flat chest  
before her astonishingly packaged man-junk  
in perfect panties I would have chosen for myself  
the knock at the door is a polite request to leave  
one place that won't deal in prostitution

At this point, return on technology becomes its demise  
digital playback can't ring my bell  
that cockney bastard stagnates—no, is enveloped  
by a curve on The Hana Highway a great deal of rain  
some blindness gives up the line that opens “Chelsea”  
is being admired for neat bigness and a flat chest  
married to another large man in the room

At this point, all language has my bloody stink on it  
slavery & mackerel & spoilt cream drag in behind me  
a pink thought bubble so thin and dreadful  
it threatens the profit of Quentin Tarantino  
admired for neat bigness and a flat chest  
even as the dog of late reproductive horniness  
I would not fuck a man whose death wish

features so prominently the figure of my sister  
naked roasting in a box. At this point,  
spare me. The penis thematic's comic offenses  
overdetermine correct usage not me not you  
is capable of parsing a knot what is called love  
ordinary callings for neat bigness and a flat chest  
crack the long front of economic history

one each          a dead fish          & a precious blade  
balance our several flesh & in our minds  
grommeted & unable    words & stars to me  
held together by shine held together

outside underwriting nobody  
sent us    & sacrifice    folds  
attention & cradling the head nun's  
plucked bird feelings

the cut matrix      & courage  
every time I say something to you  
deeply untechnical  
sometimes & almost all the time    being cut

clean enough    & served up-  
heaven now    & then the gods won't take me  
butchered the way we do here  
just to be together

the baby            got his lip split open  
roughhousing perspective

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## Preliminary Notes on Street Attacks

*I was of three minds*

*Like a tree*

*In which there are three blackbirds.*

— Wallace Stevens

1 .

pushed out the turnstile by a white man today  
being touched in so hostile a manner is better

as against another demonstration of disgust funny  
eight thousand times since the age of eleven

when you first got followed down the street  
by a stranger trying to grab your boob

you have calculated the nearness  
of whosoever is not repelled by your “hostility”

it looks bad to yell at a white man in public  
even if he has pushed you out of the way

lie down under the turnstile feign injury  
get blood on the perpetrator scratch him

he wants to stand next to a blond girl at a bar  
who is not his blond wife right next to him anyway

when a psychotic person is getting on a subway car  
and it is impossible to avoid them

I hover near an athletic black man in a suit  
tatted-up as long as he is black  
no white man on the car would do a thing  
if a crazy person with a knife tried to stab you

even take your baby  
oh yes they'd let you die

unless you fell on the tracks  
as there's some kind of context for that danger

\* \* \*

I misunderstand the rules of the supermarket aisle  
if I'm thinking sometimes I stare off into space

a white man who imagines he is being eyeballed  
can get real crazy but a lady too

told me last week not to roll my eyes at her  
a few days after George Zimmerman was acquitted

you could be twenty-three or forty-three  
you must cue social status with accessories

my blackface drag  
inflected so almost no one

can read it anymore  
out      out      out

\* \* \*

this white husband my friend says  
looks when we are all together in a family like a key

one time some photographers were chasing me  
it seemed sure they were going to hurt me

then another time he was at my side  
they stood back a respectful distance

he never said nothing to them  
sometimes I can get away with cursing a cop

now that I am older and if I am driving a BMW  
all my life fancy people think you can be honorary

if you stand near white people  
everybody's mood changes



2 .

A nightmare is a dream in which you are in service to a rich woman of indeterminate ethnicity, forced to walk her thoroughbred Maine Coon about the City on a leash, for money.

An excellent profiler of need, you are pretty well-suited for assistance. You recognize the violent misogynist, the narcissist, the compulsive, the borderline, persons suffering from bipolar illness, and addicts, immediately.

You thought a poem like this would have a chorus and require its listeners to hold hands or touch each other on the face, gently. You thought you'd go for dyspeptic undoing of l'esprit de l'escalier with classical movement, undo the poem altogether,

but you don't want to be liked for cleverness. You don't want to touch anyone or be following some girl around a gallery, then bop her on the head as a blow against racism. The spirit is of lassitude. You are a glazer.

You like a goddam blackbird and sentences. Inside your head is a grandiose place. You believe yourself to be above murder, you don't spit on people. Probably, you think you can learn anything and explain.

Publicly and for money, you are in service to explanation. One possible metaphor for microaggression is aphorism. You cannot come back from explanation to explain the poetry of the poetry.

3 .

Idiot, this morning, every earthly  
morning the light smoothness of your life is  
unprecedented. A green chicken egg's  
color is the problem of being in a shell  
on a shelf.

The line to you grows longer, scaled down  
by an English witness. You're upset. At a loss  
for nettles that never undid the primary illness,  
the sensuous thing is unstudied. Not Blake,  
nobody.

Come out of that; out of the instanced  
listening. In the company of poets, rare spots  
afflict the nervous upper lip. Terrific rageful  
liar on Whitman on Asphodel, you would lie  
to Baraka's face.

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## Lotion

*'I reject an ashy death.'*

I came up on some unfamiliar lotion<sup>1</sup> and began to think.

Let us suppose that lotion begins with principles of emulsion, which we know about from food-making. The best lotions are made from what you can eat: fat pressed from the olive and avocado, kernels, seeds and germs of shea, palm, peanut, almond, sunflower, primrose, sunflower, safflower, wheat; even the unlikely peach; even the apricot; the weird oils (o blubber of whale, o America) lanolin and jojoba; fragrant essence of lavender, rose, lemon, sage. When applied to skin in their unprocessed form, any of these, all, naturally, begin to rot.

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1 This excellent product was manufactured by the company of an old and dear friend, now a successful entrepreneur, among whose ventures include a mini-hair salon set discretely behind a curtain in a shop otherwise devoted to the sale of lotions, shampoos and other beauty products.

Of course, lotion occurs at an intersection of blackness and the market. Lotion and the practices it invokes—simple acts of living such as becoming wet or dry, ingesting or covering oneself in stuff of life—is the undressed and feminine doppelganger of an imaginary space almost completely filled by black music, which dominates every attempt to materialize black imagination. That is, to bring the materially improved self and world into existence.

Lotion proposes roughness, a core condition prone to freaks; it is, in the presence of the corrigible, those who are in need, simulacrum of all the suckings-off the world has ever known.

I do not wash my head everyday unless I have been swimming, which I don't do often as I live in New York and do not swim for exercise. Of a winter's morning when I take off my hat, it is thrilling and also repulsive to perceive a signal odor of black womanhood, rancid oil on the scalp, an odor lodged in memory quite near the smell of lightly singed hair, distinct from the smell of hair and skin chemically burned or "cured" by lye. Anyone who has ever been inside a hair salon frequented by black women knows this trinity of odors. Anyone who has ever been *near* a black woman knows it. (See fn 1.)

Indeed, just the other day, because I care for my own hair and skin, I had taken the unusual step of washing and ironing my hair before beginning an ordinary day of errands, study and writing. Because it was a cold fall day, instead of twisting my hair into a knot and securing it with pins, as is my usual practice on a workday, it occurred to me to rest both hair and scalp by wearing a wool newsboy's cap. Carelessly, I shoved my hair under a hat. A few floppy curls fell out. These I tucked behind my ears. The wind was blowing. I could smell the clean burn of my clean hair on Nostrand Avenue. I could smell it on the A train. It felt good to know that I was capable of caring for my hair and for myself in this way. Loose under my cap, I had coaxed my hair back to health, finally, after submitting to the simple, counter-intuitive truth that it acts better when I keep it straight. This isn't true for everyone, but it is true for me and my particular hair, known in the literature as type 3c (or, it might be 4a). Black hair in its

natural state is delicate, and I haven't the time to cultivate mine in the necessary way. I am an intellectual and a woman who must go to work and tend to her own survival. I accept, in my fortieth year, that the work of caring for my natural hair can, at last, be foregone. When I come out of the shower or the sea and people see my hair coiled around my face, they want to know something about why I do not choose this as my default appearance. My sister, my mother and my husband do not ask this silly question; they leave me to my business.

I got to my university and I walked into the ladies room, removing my hat as I entered. A white woman (much older than I am, who should have known better) came out of the john to announce, quite loudly, "Oh my God, what is that smell? Something is burning!" Well, nothing was burning. It was just my hair. Let me remind you that we were in a public toilet where all manner of odors proliferate, the least of which, I think, is the smell of scalded shampoo and protein. "I don't think anything is on fire," I told her, and went into a stall to pee.

My toilette is simple and extremely rigorous. Wash my head once a week. Attend to oral hygiene as frequently as is necessary. (In an age when almost everyone in the City carries some kind of pack, I cannot see why we should not have inside our packs a toothbrush and floss, at the very least. I like to have a little peroxide. My mother taught me this and her mother taught her: hydrogen peroxide for debriding and killing whatever tries to live in the

mouth). Pedicures twice a month, never resorting to chemical removal of skin. I keep my fingernails short, and bare. Frequently, I wear no make-up at all, although, if I am feeling old or not very pretty, I resort to a little kohl and gloss. Bathe no less than twice a day. Bathing more frequently than this is a sign of mental illness. Less—for others—is fine.

I remove hair with enormous frequency, but I do not follow the most common or popular practices in this regard. I rarely cut the hair on my head, for example; I find it is unnecessary. Since I keep my hair long, it maintains itself in decent order without the constant trimming many hairstylists recommend. (See fn 1.) In summer, I respect the moderately oppressive governing expectation that I should remove hair under my arms, from my legs, groin and belly. In colder months, I remove hair only as my lover requests, and reluctantly, since I cannot overstate the discomfort and rage I experience each time I subject myself to any variation of the “bikini wax,” a barbaric and bizarre practice, the basic point of which (removing hair from the opening of the vagina and around the clitoris) can be accomplished painlessly with a thirty-five dollar pair of electric clippers that serve for years.

Although women speak loudly and publicly of the removal of hair from their labia and ass-cracks, it is considered unseemly to speak of a woman’s facial hair outside of a controlled and rigorously policed set of rules. Women and men may speak openly of the practice of shaping a woman’s eyebrows. With an intimate, one

may speak of removing hair above the upper lip or the removal of a few stray hairs on the chin with a tweezer. Only one woman as hirsute as myself has ever spoken to me of the removal of hair from her neck, from her entire face, in copious amounts from her chin, and she was, herself, a well-compensated expert in these matters, and a black woman, and a beauty. The aestheticians who remove hair from my face play a special role in my life.

The slightly ridiculous bodily conditions each of us lives with daily—after a day of not-writing, the collected and swept up pile of flakes from my cuticles, black oils scraped from beneath my thumbnails, the stray bit of scalp and something swabbed from the cat's eye.

One commercial lotion for my face, one for my body, one for my cuticles and the odd blemish or rash, one for my hands, several for my hair; those I recommend to others, recommendations I have taken. In the refrigerator, ongoing experiments with volatile fats (coconut oil, pure shea); on my bureau emergency lotion purchased while out-of-town, disregarded as useless—wrongly conceived and executed with unreasonably high alcohol or glycerin content. Lotions that are too thin. For years and years, nothing sold over the counter *worked*. For life-long care of simple dry skin, nothing a dermatologist has ever prescribed works. Nothing sold in a department store works. (Occasionally, a wonder like Oil of Olay!) Lotions whose makers choose (wisely) to make a great deal of money instead of excellent lotion. Always, Vaseline, in a pinch. A dab of olive oil is a quick fix.

Lotion is a palliative. What does it correct? It corrects ash. What is ashiness? Ash is a gray track of evident decay, most striking in contrast with darker skins, brown skins, tending to black.

After bathing, I apply both face and body lotions. After handwashing, hand lotion. In the winter, I apply an extra layer of thick oily cream, too oily for the hands (but good for the thin skin on the shins that cracks in cold, dry weather) to my heels and elbows. Sometimes I notice a black woman unknown to me, not homeless, whose legs or feet or hands are so ashy that I wonder whether she has lost her mind.

Liniments are a second class of lotions, meant to address a deeper set of problems.

I find myself on my knees with some rags and a bucket filled with scalding hot soapy water and bleach. My mother has visited and discovered some scuzz on the stepladder that I am obliged to use for retrieving bowls, pitchers and the like from the uppermost shelves in my apartment. I am wiping clots of greasy dirt from the rungs of this already ugly metal thing, scrubbing also the dirty bands of floor that protrude beyond spaces that “cannot be cleaned”—the edge-of-under the refrigerator, the stove, the dishwasher, the poorly installed, cheap formica cabinets. Filth. On my knees now, I perform an act of penitence; in that this dirt has been discovered and named and pointed to, I am humiliated; in that *suggestions* have been made regarding the method of

its eradication, too, I am humiliated. Over the telephone, my mother insists that I kneel, of course, on some towels or sheets, folded several times to protect my knees from being scratched or scraped, made dark or scaly from work. “Are you wearing gloves?” she asks. “You wouldn’t want to get an infection. It’s how your father almost lost his arm. They made him scrub the floors.” My father had osteomyelitis as a teenager. A serious infection led to several botched surgeries, all performed while he was locked up in a facility for juveniles somewhere outside Philadelphia. In fights, he used his casts as weapons and never recovered the full use of his scarred right arm and hand. I never knew that, about the floors, I tell my mother, sloshing a rag around in the putrid bucket.

Our crooked fingers are soft, soft, all my parents’ children.

I maintain dominion over the crevices of myself, deep into the layers of my skin, which must never be questioned. Never doubt that these crevices extend toward an infinitely receding boundary. Come close to me to feel it.





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Arthur / 51

*but pattern is a local feature resonant to the formal field of the whole, and the poem has its formal identity not in itself but in the field of poetry it belongs to*

—Robert Duncan



Simone / 11

At dawn the humming has not become so great  
as to obstruct inviting inputs of, say, words,  
unevenly apportioned at any rate  
along, let us call it a pathway, but, if you can,  
try not to say “neural,” treat condition  
as ordnance (what a sound) ordnance, or  
tinnitus. If only

my body would ring like a simple ear.

Draw out an ear with charcoal / whatever they use to draw with  
(I don't understand drawing so well, and it's OK. Macro-analyses of  
space and color spread my brain tight. They tighten me up, like a  
corner, like symphonic gestures, like prosody. Take me outside and  
beat me with a fresh green switch  
to get that whistling oak twig / holler).  
Gross render me an ear.

In possession of my instruments,  
slake feeling in the prehensile cool part of day  
reading hours away in tribute to 11 occupations.  
Originating whole series intakes by reading this way or cracking silent  
when they come to rebuild the broken deck.  
In the cubby part of day, you would think all capable  
of reasoning entire worlds. Transposed coming ray  
in evident readiness to talk your way out of the rest.

Michael / 2

*for M.P.*

I guess I don't have a strong desire / to hear any more Afrobeat  
or was over the death of Fela a long time ago, turning now  
to Big Black, on watch for Mandela to go over.

Mike Veal, explain this to me; you know the Happy Valley  
better than anybody. No one expects the Kingston hostel  
kicked-up in perfect salutation of Pinkest queer love  
around Independence Day, whichever one.

Musical genius trouble / the fuck out my inner Yankee.

[She. Bet She sun the Devil at Northampton  
Gay Head straight his wicked back cane  
Pottawatomie. Then left and came back.]

You think a black witch cannot ride frontier light around Leyden,  
skip Salem, haunt the Yankee line to straighten  
my ragged and beloved East. Pure linearity is Yankee, so the witch  
circles out the open sky up there. The broom crosses her jagged  
principle effort as counter phenomenon. Broom / joke.

Take my broom. Here. Try to take it.

Make the blacklit Berkshires right now on this humbug,  
on this joke sign with a witch on it.

## P o e m

let us have misprision again everybody  
without the technical name for gospel

three creatures in three days bite  
against the expected punishments

nothing but mistakes come to mind  
that is not a poem I could write



Arthur / 51

for Arthur Miller,

a handsome man

in a 'stale' marriage

youthfully proposed in Prospect Park,

tall brown Arthur,

dark Viking

full of mashed potatoes

drunk

ignorant

of the coming

ingénue

## P l a n a r

Desire for a clean plane,  
measure of tilting planes  
of the hands, a sum on the one hand  
of two hands and counting feet,  
sing muscle.

Muscle scraped, visionary  
pectoralis peeled back,  
underneath, the heart's minor tapes.

In a clean plane, against  
bound breasts, I roll  
among permitted variation, I traverse  
the gut kept there. Keep to  
planes, put away death  
inside his thigh.

## Kettle to Pot

Unable to pour boiling water  
over an edge from kettle to pot  
water boils from kettle to neti pot  
still boils from kettle to cup running over  
boil pool steam pool leak pool

little cooling pot over the boiled edge  
of boil pooled salt vapors  
sulfurous stank boil heal dangled over  
the boiled edge of burnt earth  
cooling salt pool nettle stung  
black clotted blood at the bottom  
of the sink

There was a time I hardly went three steps  
Except another black girl was with me.

Mother. Always lonely. I am always.  
Mother those girls. Forty-two.

March summer. Light blue. Vermont.  
Endless crescent. Invert as a tyke lake.

Fernet Mother. I'm grown. Forest.  
San Francisco. Lone cold.

Stone turd. Talk three or none.  
Kidding.  
Kidding.

Don't nuzzle me fucker-maker  
Rinky-dink kale feeding guinea pig  
Fonky bag uh cornchips plastic shoe  
Wearing crinkle-fry bastard  
. . . up in here TONIGHT  
Wanchu go head mister plinth butt  
And roll ya dumb ass a lavender  
Cigarette don't make me slap a freeze  
On this wart-o-matic bullshit  
Get me a rancorous tinker toy  
N turn this motherfucker out

## It Must Be Shameless

Apart disclaimed wicked pea, split soft skin  
of the principle princess, who writhes,  
a little blood passes her perineum every night,  
grey linen sheets flax talisman plot luxe  
to strip and scrub all gore  
a plain bar of secret white soap  
it is a pine tree, it is an orange blossom, is it a rose hip  
under a baby tongue, blood cuts  
punisher, swear it closed, closes it

## Probably Your Soulmate

Portland wraps the fruit for export, the remainder left

neither \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_

for birds to bump into. Even the spider has a way

loves my mother

of stabbing the banana, I guess. The way they are so black

the way it is possible to love a fine

haughty woman

in the market, the callaloo's so grand and blowsy

when everyone knows her husband

so the merchant can reach it from her seat.

\_\_\_\_\_

The oily mountain coffee I imagine having tasted as a child

I must love her then

is nowhere to be found and whoever goes into the bush up the mountain

enough for the women who cannot

they can't understand me when I say the darkest what she keeps for herself.

even when I cannot

I don't know how the sun cooks that turnip transparent

tell her, either, anything real

as the Sea; (my family are laughing at me again)

I have no patois for transparent turnip and cannot make myself understood.

Do stop giving me that list; I can't read it.



## Anthony

Sat down with Arlo's book today, in which  
Jubilee Singers make a map all the time  
of the difficult North Star and I try to get easy  
enough to make it fair so I can wave at Arlo  
maybe sing to you both if I get near enough  
alongside friendly-like green-eyed white men

given a reason I could be jealous but never was yet  
it's your dancing that specifies the rotation  
a nil class position we see in the bafflement of each other  
nobody else can get into it like you have become  
lost walking away from the original farm

what a relief to be nobody and hold your hand in the middle of the night  
when the heat coming from inside me and the klonopin knotted together  
are making me real uncomfortable and has been there all this time

## Anthony

Sat down with Dana's book today, in which

I had got surprised every time some photographer  
wanted to put me in pictures  
begin weeping now or in the shower over a cystic blemish  
afame in a place you couldn't see before you ran a little more  
a little further than you thought you could but not so much your  
toenails fall off  
blemish warming in your genes like a tiny fat roll  
or shameful tuck of subway muscle behind that weak tendon  
but not so weak you can't run any more, love

a surprising number of people more beautiful than average  
congregate around my pussy I mean my poverty  
ooo see what you made me do, Dana  
my heart & lungs are so mean  
pound for pound on my feet  
the old men in the hood love me as usual  
but now I've discovered the blowjob trade  
at midday in the chicken joints and candy stores

surprise loathes a feminist come without promises to the corner  
sneer to uptight sneer  
you know the etymology of uptight, Dana?  
not a person who sings to herself not even the soulful music of  
Kenny Gamble

touches the swagger nerve very close to the surface in me  
so it's unclear whether she's fucking at this point in time  
it's early in the life yet to be written  
late in the game though I'm not really sorry

sudden overdevelopment in salutatory surprise  
cleans my clock wets my whistle makes the dogs go  
mmm girl any day of the week      then let it be every day of the week  
fool      Hey, Dana      I think you might be a genius  
for the sound of how the street moves through me  
on a grosgrain ribbon  
the street comes out through every open part of me  
do I or do I not keep it in my pants

## Anthony

Sat down with Anselm's book today, in which  
Obviously drunk my favorite secret is how quietly drunk I can be  
I spread my toes over the silken surface of GQ  
So little lights come on in the wordspace  
Plinky lights shaped like chili peppers  
Memorialize the skinny drunk phase of life  
Where my record of arrest and recovery's absolutely pristine  
When I could no longer drink bourbon I stole dyed beaver  
I wrested gauze kimono from racist manners  
I called the cops myself  
Stationed under the aqueduct  
The eighteenth century blows in on the creek wind and stinks of  
plain black dirt  
Some horseshit mixed in for good measure  
Yes, I was coming up the street home  
And a white guy on a horse traveled with me for a while  
He talked to me about his family stables  
Like in Philadelphia sometimes happens because it ain't New York



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