


EX
UMBRA
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EX UMBRA 41

Ex Umbra

The Literary Magazine of
North Carolina Central University

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Out of the Shadows

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Ex Umbra 41

Table of Contents

Editor's Note	Angela N. Haile	v
That Only Makes Us Stronger	Brittany N. Brooks	1
The Kid	David Morris	2
The Reason	The Burke	3
Thinking	Sh'Myra Moore	4
How Can I Say	Quentin N. Gardner	5
Black Woman	Ariel Germain	6
Millennium Woman	David Morris	8
I Keep The Secrets	Yolanda R. Whitted	9
Success in Black	David Morris	10
Young Black Males	Roderick Heath	11
Someday We Shall Leave	Ihuoma Ezeh	12
Remembering You	Karen Bethea	13
Eye Know, But Do You?	Erica Scott	14
Do You Really Know How I Feel?	Natasha B. Posey	15
Interview With an Artist: David Morris	Angela N. Haile	16
Forbidden Fruit	Dominique R. Battle	18
Maybe Next Time	Mark A. Lee III	19
The Unexpected	Michelle McILwain	21
Boy Meets World	David Morris	22
The End of Summer	James R. Freeman	23
If I Must Be True	Michael Underdue	24
Love in Its Purest Form	Christina E. Garrett	25
Broken Bliss	Tori Pittman	27
Bull City Blues	Justin Leak	28
Parts	Tresaun C. Lee	29
He Loves Me	David Morris	30
Every Woman Should	Shawn Bell	31

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Independent Thinker	Joanna Hernandez	32
A Mother's Gift	Rick Redden	34
Lover's Line	Sasha Vann	35
My Children/ The Poet	Yolanda R. Whitted	36
I Love You	A. McCrae	37
God Spoke To Me	Dominique R. Battle	39
I Love Black Women	David Morris	40
African Queens	Roderick Heath	41
Afraid To Love Again	Brittany N. Brooks	42
The Good Taker	Angela N. Haile	43
Newsflash	Joslyn Bloomfield	47
Search for the Perfect Man	Karen Bethea	48
Symbolism and "The Lottery"	Gregory Wilson	49
HBCU	Natasha L. Gilliam	50
U-Haul	Joslyn Bloomfield	57
Me, Myself and I	Jamia Green	58
A Poem for Rosa Parks	Vanessa Jackson	59
In the Closet	Joslyn Bloomfield	60
Sister Girl, I Pity You	Abebe Axum	61
Rwanda	Darryl Harris	62
What a Difference a Day Makes	Karen Bethea	63
Soul Cry	LaKea M.D. Dill	64

EX UMBRA 41

Editor's Note

They say it gets easier the second time around. Maybe that applies to some things, but it doesn't apply to editing a literary magazine. However, this time I've taken the knowledge and experience that I've gained through the past two years and have tried to apply it here.

As you know, this issue was not supposed to be published. We got our pink slip last year, along with our things packed in boxes and some things lost forever. But, with the support of Chancellor Ammons, the English Department and the Campus Echo, we were able to get a new office, with more money and more readers. Who says things don't work out in the end?

I have to thank Dr. Williams for giving me the opportunity to do what I love again. Also, thank you to everyone who submitted their work. You all continue to keep this magazine alive.

Thanks also to David Morris, the featured artist in this issue. He is a genius. I told him what I needed and he delivered. Make sure you keep this issue because I guarantee he'll be famous soon.

I invite everyone reading this magazine, whether student, teacher or staff, to see themselves in these pages. *Ex Umbra* puts into words exactly what NCCU is. So, if you don't see your life in this magazine, make sure it is in the next issue by submitting your work.

Please enjoy this issue with many more to come.

Angela N. Haile

EX UMBRA 41

That Only Makes Us Stronger

A blessing wouldn't be a blessing,
If we didn't know hard times.
Peace wouldn't be peace,
If we didn't experience crimes.
New friends wouldn't be new,
If fake friends stuck around longer.
Troubles won't break up true love,
They only make it stronger.

A smile wouldn't be a smile,
If it wasn't because of you.
Love wouldn't be as sweet,
If that love wasn't true.
Turmoil won't tear us apart,
This relationship will last much longer.
Haters won't stop us now,
They'll only make us stronger.

Brittany N. Brooks

OUT OF THE SHADOWS



EX UMBRA 41

The Reason

Hey, you with the fire in your eyes.
Hey, I thought I saw you smile.
Don't be the one who did it on the run.
Don't be the one who did it on the run.

A few miles left to go,
Debating fears I cannot show.
Should I hide or run with my convictions?
Will she understand my good intentions?

Dedicating my life all over again.
Hoping for more than just a friend.
My anxiety becomes my torment.
How I've awaited this moment.

Oh, how I've longed for a girl like this.
To shudder at her touch and to live for her kiss.
Hoping for a night of passion.
Should I leave this up to her discretion?

Don't be the one who did it on the run.

You've got to live life until the living is gone.
You've got to live *your* life until the living is gone.

A silhouette emerges in the door.
She's nothing, yet all I've been looking for.
My reason to believe in love...

The Burke

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Thinking

Last night I started thinking about the way I dress,
act and wear my hair.
Why I do the things I do, and does anyone really care?
I thought about my room and the things I could add.
I was just thinking about the simple things,
Until my thinking got serious and my thoughts took over.
I wasn't in control anymore, and I knew because I felt a tear.
My thoughts forced me to think of my daddy
as I had never done before.
Why I had so much anger and fear balled up inside.
I cried. I mean, I really cried.
My thoughts told me that I had been wiping
my tears for the last five years,
And it was time to release all my fears and built-up tears.
My thoughts didn't stop until my healing
was somewhat complete.
And then, my simple thoughts returned.

Sh' Myra Moore

EX UMBRA 41

How Can I Say What Is Too Much For Words?

How can I say what is too much for words?
A rainbow cannot fit into my heart.
Perhaps we should be as musical as birds,
Perched, singing of our love with practiced art.
You cannot taste my happiness,
Or feel but a little of the chill of your caress,
And no word or metaphor can make it real,
Real songs contain the truth that I would express.
That in my love there are mountains high,
Hills and valleys, rainbow carpeted and wide,
Diverging enough for clear, still lakes to steal the sky...
And R-R-R!!! I cannot tell you what's inside!
So you must turn to what you feel for me,
And read therein my tender rhapsody.
Reach deep, my love, and I will be there too,
You have me in your heart, as I have you.

Quentin N. Gardner

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Black Woman

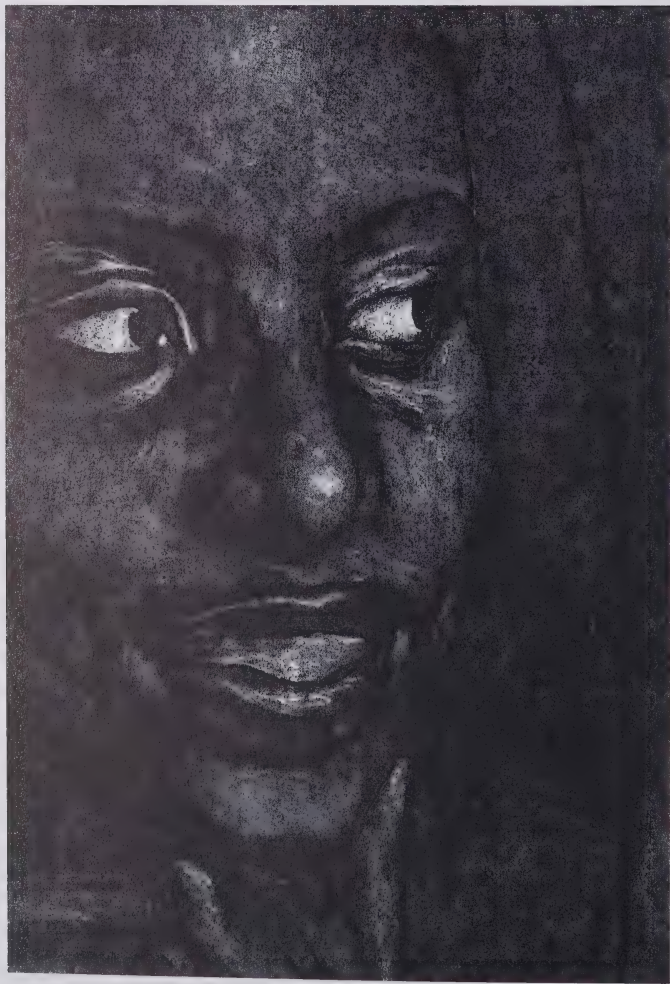
Maya Angelou called you phenomenal woman.
Suga Avery called you “sista”
and sang about your hardships,
but I call you the Millennium’s Black Woman.
She comes in many complexions,
from a gold that is so bright
it blinds the eye, to brown so dark
it reminds you of Hershey’s Special Dark.
With this wondrous array of colors come their different sizes.
Nevertheless, the size and
color of this Millennium Black Woman
is not of any import.
It is her intellect that makes
women and men come correct.
While the sway of her hips can raise any man,
it is her perseverance to improve the world
that will raise her man’s spirits.
Yes, Maya had it right,
we are phenomenal women;
hey, I fit that mold.
But it is how these Millennium Women
start the world’s new beginning.

EX UMBRA 41

We are women devoted to change, growth,
uprising and most of all, life.
Educating ourselves to teach our seeds.
Learning to have poise and be a little,
should I say, yes, uppity.
This Millennium Woman
is far past the stereotype of
our great-grandmothers (may God bless their souls)
of being someone's mammy.
We are doctors, lawyers,
CEOs, AKAs, Deltas, mothers, wives,
sisters, coaches, teachers and preachers.
We are African-American, Jamaican,
Haitian, Dominican,
Trinidadian and from our motherland.
This new Millennium Woman
is one to be proud of.
Not the girl in the Petey Pablo video,
but the college co-ed
who learned how to use pro-tools to insure
the quality of her lyrics.
Yes, I am happy to say I am a Black Woman,
but not just any black woman,
I am the Millennium Black Woman.

Ariel Germain

OUT OF THE SHADOWS



EX UMBRA 41

I Keep The Secrets

I am the writer.

I keep the secrets no friends can be trusted with.

I keep the secrets no lover could know.

I pretend like there are none,

But hidden deep within my bosom are many.

The man I once loved, hidden within my poetry

As the lark in lofty branches seeks out his mate.

I tell some,

But keep many silent within my breasts.

Tattooed on skin

Messages of love

Covered by messages of tenderness.

I cannot uncover the lot of them,

Just as you, I have some only sacred to me.

No one should be trusted with them.

No one could care for them, save me.

So there they are, hidden, suckled and thriving.

Within the halting suppurations of my breasts, sleeping,

Waiting and wanting

Until the day of my expiration.

Yolanda R. Whitted

OUT OF THE SHADOWS



EX UMBRA 41

Young Black Males

They say we're trouble from the start.
When we're around it's a fact that trouble will start.
We kill over diamonds and gold,
But history states that my native land was seized and stole.
Chained and shipped on a boat.
Hungry, so we learned to steal
From sisters, brothers and from the old.
Young black males raised in a society
Where America don't give a shit
Three strikes and that's it.
We die behind a concrete fence.
Young black males, if we don't wake-up
Those prison bars and that graveyard will soon fill up.
We survived months on a boat,
But America thinks our brains have yet to arrive.
Martin paved the roads,
Young black males, it's time we learned how to drive.

Roderick Heath

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Someday, We Shall Leave...

That hour, that minute, that second
Panting and gasping for one more breath
And in a flash, the glimpse of life is over.
Only then shall the summary of life give true meaning.
Nothing we own is truly ours.
The hair we comb is a loan from the Supreme.
The skin we proudly parade is an extraction from the Earth.
The air we freely breathe will someday cease
And soon the borrowed shall return to its owner.
We are not bound to the Earth forever.
The trials and tribulations are but temporary.
Every moment, every minute, every second
Draws us closer to the end of the chapter of life.

Ihuoma Ezeh

EX UMBRA 41

Remembering You

When I am happy
I think of calling you
Wanting to share my good news
Or good fortune with you

When I am sad
I think of calling you
Wanting a sympathetic ear
Just someone to listen

When I am lonely
And I need to feel needed
I think of calling you
Hoping to fill the void that lies within me

Then I remember
You are the one who helped cause the void
You are the one who rejected me for someone else
You are the one who didn't think I was 'right' for you

I remember that calling you is no longer an option
Especially if I want to keep
My sanity
My self-respect
And peace of mind

So I don't call you
I just remember you
And remind myself
That I can do better

Karen Bethea

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Eye Know, But Do You?

You can never know too much about a person. Sometimes it's the things you don't know about someone that can hurt you the most. They say that you can tell almost everything about a person by just looking into their eyes. Even if that is true, there are some things that the eyes just don't tell.

You could never be able to look into someone's eyes and tell how they have had to live their life. Whether or not they had parents to give them guidance, parents who abandoned them for a mate of the opposite or same sex, maybe for the love of drugs and alcohol, or parents who are even still alive. Could the eyes tell whether or not a child had to grow up in fear of a molesting or highly abusive parent? Could they tell a person's educational life, spontaneous adolescent adventures or someone's first love?

Even though the eyes can speak to you in many different ways, they can only say so much. They could speak with tears, but how much can they say more than "I am sad, terrified or maybe just overwhelmed with joy"? All of these actions do indeed speak, but there is still that empty space soon filled by the eyes saying, "Eye Know, But Do You?" The eyes could speak with brightness and glee, saying, "I am happy, anxious or excited," but once again there is that space leaving the eyes no choice but to wonder, "Eye Know, But Do You?" The eyes can only tell someone to a certain extent what is going on, barely scratching the surface of secrets that may be lying deep within the beholder; and there is a possibility that they may be dug up, but there is a very slim chance that the eyes would have told them.

Erica Scott

EX UMBRA 41

Do You Really Know How I Feel?

Do you really know how I feel?
Knowing your mother pops pills
So that she can be high
To not know where she is
In the middle of the night
To have strangers coming in and out of your home
To have a man raping you while you scream, "LEAVE ME
ALONE"
Do you really know how I feel?
To not have a father
To have a mother who, for drugs
Would sell her own daughter
To become a ward of the state
Where people have permission to rape
To get fondled while you sleep
Blood traveling with your pee
Do you really know how I feel?

Natasha B. Posey

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Interview With an Artist: David Morris

EX: What is your major and what year are you?

DM: I'm a junior Art major with a concentration in Visual Communications.

EX: When did you begin drawing?

DM: I first started drawing when I was in high school. I had an art class like most people did, and my teachers started to notice that I was pretty good.

EX: Who inspires you as an artist?

DM: Since there aren't many famous or highly known artists outside the art community, I would have to say that a lot of music, movies and everyday life. But if I had to choose, I would have to say Spike Lee. I would like to do as an artist what he does for movies, especially in the early 90's.

EX: Who is your favorite artist?

DM: Right now I would have to say Ernie Barnes because I love his style and he graduated from NCCU. He's still probably one of the most successful black artists.

EX: What was your first drawing?

DM: I drew my kindergarten teacher with crayons.

EX: What do you plan to do when you graduate?

DM: Eventually I want to be a millionaire, but once I graduate I guess I could settle for a job in the media or entertainment industry, doing something creative.

EX UMBRA 41

EX: How did you get your art showcased at the NCCU Art Museum?

DM: Every year, for the last month of school through the summer, the NCCU Art Museum holds a student exhibition that includes art selected by an outside source. This year I was lucky enough to be chosen.

EX: Which one of your submissions is your favorite and why?

DM: "Success in Black," for the poem "Young Black Males," is my favorite because being a young, black male myself, I automatically related to this poem. Mainly because I am a young, black man and also because I ended up using my older brother to model for the picture, so I feel like I have a connection with it.

Angela N. Haile

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Forbidden Fruit

It doesn't make sense
But it makes a good poem
The feeling in my heart is still warm
The warmth in my body is still strong
But the song within my words is sad
They don't make sense
I couldn't have you when I had the chance
Now you're taken
And maybe now I'm trying to fake it,
How I feel
But it really is hard for me to make sense of this.
I'm trying to play it...cool
And not make a fool of myself
Even if it's harder for me to write this
Than to say it
My mouth is watering for a taste of
Forbidden fruit

Dominique R. Battle

EX UMBRA 41

Maybe Next Time

“Did you see me?” I asked my daddy who wasn’t there.

“Did you see me?” I asked a daddy who didn’t care.

“Did you...”

“Maybe next time around,” says my father. “Maybe next time...”

“Daddy, can you help me with my work?” I say to my mother.

“Daddy, can we play?” I say to my brother.

“Can we...”

“Maybe next time around,” says my father. “Maybe next time...”

“Father, can you teach me how to love a woman?”

“But first, can you teach me how to be a man?”

“Can...you...please...”

“Maybe next time around,” says my father. “Maybe next time...”

“Sir, will you be there as I gain this knowledge, through elementary, high school and college?”

“Will you...”

“Maybe next time around,” says my father. “Maybe next time...”

“How ‘bout the football games”

“Maybe next time...”

“The baseball games?”

“Maybe next time...”

“My first day of school?”

“Maybe next time...”

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

“My first time in the pool?”

“Maybe next time...”

“My first day of class?”

“Maybe next time...”

“My first date, my first dance?”

“The day I was potty trained?”

“My first words, my graduation?”

“My first love and first pain?”

“The birds and the bees talk?”

“The first time I walked?”

“Will you see it, daddy?”

“Maybe...maybe next time around...”

“Well daddy, I’m grown now.”

“On my own now.”

“So when will I forgive you?”

“Maybe...maybe next time around.”

Mark A. Lee III

EX UMBRA 41

The Unexpected

I've fallen for you in a way I never thought I could.
And I'm now telling you what I never thought I would.
A lot of things I've wanted to ask or say,
Yet I keep it to myself.
Scared of what I have to lose,
Yet afraid what I lose might be you.
Not wanting to push you away,
But express to you why I want you to stay.
It makes my day to be in your arms
And take sips of your lips.
To laugh and play in our special way
I wish it could last more than one night and day.
I'm realizing now just how often I think about you
Wondering if you're missing me
As much as I'm missing you
You walk into something expecting nothing
But come out full of feelings
Now learning to never doubt
And not be afraid of a different route
But expect the unexpected.

Michelle McIlwain

OUT OF THE SHADOWS



EX UMBRA 41

The End of Summer

The summer is gone.

I can tell that the summer is gone as I look at the still scenery
like a portrait of my neighborhood block.

As I plop on the steps of my front porch as if I were lifeless, I
see the children,

The same children,

The playful children,

Wearing oversized book bags and new clothes

Talking about their summer and admiring each other's first
day outfits

I watch them as they wait at the bus stop

I've grown to know most of them in the neighborhood like the
street signs

And they've grown to know me like their favorite song.

But today there is a new street, and to this street a new song

A young child, new to my eyes, is guided by his mother's
hand to the bus stop

As tears fall from the child's face like busted hydrants, I can't
help but sit and wonder

As I too was a child once, and those tears used to be mine

But the child must understand that he'll be fine

It's just a short trip to begin building your future, but don't let
your future be a short trip.

The bus comes down the street like a late train

The hydrant drains and drains

The last one on the bus free from his mother's hand

Steps slowly onto the bus in route to a different land

Remember this day young one, as I remember mine

The day I rode the school bus for the first time.

James R. Freeman

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

If I Must Be True

If I must be true
Than the touch of evil will influence u
I must last to teach others about u
Cuz' your evil will destroy what's left of u
Known as a fearless man
But succumbs to the danger that the evil professes
And my life is taken out of my hands
Placed in the cups of an eternal truth
That inspires evil gallop away as truth
Your spirit remains intact after your dying day
May the impressions I left aid another into realizing their truth
Cuz' Evil cannot last against the blessings of the truth
But that's if I must be true.

Michael Underdue

EX UMBRA 41

Love in Its Purest Form

I desire love in what I consider is its purest form.
If you can love me when I'm a mess...at my lowest
states...and I'm not lookin' my best.
When I appear the most disgusting (whether physically,
spiritually, what have you)
When I am the most embarrassing to be around.
When rumors fly about,
When people criticize you for even wanting to be with me,
Because I'm not like everybody else.
If you can accept me when I don't behave like you think I
should
And my idiosyncrasies rule the day...
If we can laugh without me being the butt of every joke.
If you can love me deeply in the midst of all this...
I dare say, lest God says otherwise, I will be yours.
If you can critique me without lacking constructive criticism
I will be yours.
If you can love me as Christ loves the church and gave his life
for it
I will be yours.
If you can love me as Christ loves the church
And gave his life for it
I will be yours.
If you can understand me...

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Or will stand by me and hold my hand,
Even when you don't understand...
If you love me this way I will reciprocate
With more passion than you could ever comprehend or
imagine
If you could only give me love in its purest form...
If you walk away, but are willing to come back
In the most crucial of moments,
When you're mad at me,
But care too much to leave...
I will be yours.
You will have my devotion as a friend, lover, Sister in Christ
and ultimately your wife.
I speak so seriously....perhaps because this goes past the
physical, for beauty is only skin deep.
This goes into your mind, will, and emotions—your soul, it's a
choice.
Nowadays, to ask for love in its purest form is like chasing a
pipe dream, save with God.
But that is what I want...are you willing?

Christina E. Garrett

EX UMBRA 41

Broken Bliss

On a natural high, I'm trapped between a mournful epidemic
and a torn epiphany.

Not knowing where to go; the fork in the road makes it
difficult,

Yet the dark and foggy paths make it obvious.

As I turn around, there's no one but me that's seeing this.

The whole time I lived a lie that takes me back
to my youth and beyond.

It was all a let down, an expected let down

Like where I stand or what I touch may be severed when it's
not even my intention.

So pieces of me are going down both paths
as my body stands still

While my uncontrolled tears attract the calm of the storm,

To find out that I'm in a broken bliss

Of what I wanted to be and in reality it's not, that makes me
feel sick and sad, but I still walk on with what I have left to
veil me, from this broken bliss.

Tori Pittman

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Bull City Blues

Folks don't grow tobacco here anymore.
They just grow restless waiting for their ships to come in.
No docks or shipyards 'round here,
Just red clay they try to build into boutiques
And malls for all the white folks to shop.
But, if they'd stop and look around,
They'd see black folk down and out singing the blues.
Some folks yelling the blues,
Telling everyone on that bus heading downtown.
Hell, I don't even live in the worst part of town,
But something about the city of medicine makes me sick.

Justin Leak

EX UMBRA 41

Parts

There are parts of me that I cannot live without, and my lips, the minutest of them all, are one of them. To taste Skye or devour Kim is a wonderment I cease to exist without. How must love overrule me? Grab the parts of me that are void and in search of definition. I do not know of anything more. Not of life without love or that lust that creeps beneath shallow sheets at dire hours.

I beckon on tall hills of greenery to the heavens. Do you know what they tell me? Can you fathom in the least? “You shall not find such enchantments.” I will flow with rivers that call my name or with clouds that form pictures, but never in the heart of lust. Kimberly holds my love, but Skye captures me as does a camera a thousand words. She quiets my sadness and brings smiles, I know not, to the face that cries. Tears of joy have burned behind eyelids and twitched the creases of my mouth, but never in my life have they fluttered my spine and shivered my lips.

There are parts of me that I cannot live without and the smallest, the most insignificant of them are my lips. They have quivered in raindrops and tasted the tip of God’s heel, but they linger on the fragrance of others. Oh poor soul that dies inside of me. Let me loose. Take me to another life and tell that devil I had an angel in my arms and I let her go. She belonged in heaven, away from the fire in my hands or the flame in my eyes. I did not mean to burn her and to singe the edges of her crown. God, I would have loved her, but you chose to take me. And now I lie dead...without either.

Tresaun C. Lee

OUT OF THE SHADOWS



EX UMBRA 41

Every Woman Should

Every woman should be adored.
She should never feel unappreciated or bored
With a man that doesn't know her worth.
She should be treated like a queen from day to day.
Swept off her feet in every way,
That's just how it should be.

Too many women are being used and mistreated,
Not to mention the one's that are lied to and cheated.
Where's the love or even the respect that every woman
deserves?

A diamond in the rough is rare,
So when men find that diamond,
They are supposed to take extra good care of her.

Call her to see how she's doing.
Have a home-cooked meal waiting for her after work.
Notice little changes and listen when she talks.
I believe every woman should be treated,
The way women have been treating men for years.
I'm sure every woman would agree,
That's the way it should be.

Shawn Bell

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Independent Thinker

I saw an independent thinker,
with his independent mind, so full
of religion, education, politics and life.
He's married to black, some call it his wife
And this is apparent in his dress, a Che Guevara T-shirt and an
ankh around his neck.
On occasion he might read to me.
Last month the Quran, this month Marcus Garvey.
His passion for our people has brought me to tears
And I've heard him speak of the revolution for years.
At his first rally when his fist met the sky, I was there.
Just as I was when he decided to lock his hair.
He calls me to talk about what's on his mind,
Just to compare his thoughts with mine.
We debate about the importance of voting,
He says it's pointless and won't change a thing,
I say we don't have a voice if our votes aren't seen.
He says a preacher man is the best of Beres,
I say whatever.
I tell him I heard Queen Sheba perform spoken word live,
I say it was beautiful, and he's not surprised.
I love that about him.
When I look into his eyes,
I see our spiritual and mental ties.

EX UMBRA 41

We relate on those levels
He refers to females as princesses and queens.
He calls me la Reina de Buenos Aires,
Most times just Reina, he says it suits me.
His thoughts are poetic to me.
His ideas are music to me.
His words can seem like everything to me at times.
I think I am in love with his mind.
How ironic I should be fascinated with his mind when that's
what he sees me with.
I saw an independent thinker, with his independent mind,
so smart,
I wish I saw him as an independent heart.

Joanna Hernandez

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

A Mother's Gift

U gave me all the dreams, inspirations and more
U gave me the light that opened the door
U were there 4 me through ups and downs
U were there 4 me through my smiles and frowns
U were there 4 me as a mother and a father
When other parents would say why bother
Being there 4 their kid
Through all the hurtful wrongs they did
U taught me right from wrong
Showed me through tough situations how to be strong
These are my words that are expressed from the heart
When God created me, he sent me 2 an angel from the start

Rick Redden

EX UMBRA 41

Lover's Line

When I touch the space around me, I want to feel you laying your head down beside me / touching the crown of my king where his roots lay / spread about me like leaves / grounded like trees / I see him in the back of my head and in front of my face / our eyes touch, such grace/ I trace his lips with the guide of brown finger tips/ full lips/ black man, I love your shoulder slope connected to a full back bone/ king of my throne/ bless you while you sleep/ I weep tears of joy and anxiety/ thankful for the man that lies next to me yet sad for those who don't feel me cause they can't feel you/ my love, I adore how you lie/ your body inclined/ head softly touching mine/ face tilts to the side/ ready to kiss mine/ how divine, this sweet ecstasy/ you fulfill my every being/ I look at you as if it were the first time/ when I spit my first line/ how we sat together and spit our first rhyme/ my brother, how you lay with your arm gently on my shoulder/ the older I get, the closer I get to your natural black spirit/ I get bolder, never fearing the outcome because I know you're a soldier/ and I love how you lay as you sleep/ I feel you breathe/ I can count your heart beat/ I feel that you sleep in peace/ and I'm at ease cause you're in my vicinity/ when I lay down, I feel you right next to me/ warm air on my face, open my eyes, I see you sleeping/ and thank GOD that you're breathing/ alive and in my life, brother I love how you live in me.

Sasha Vann

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

My Children/ The Poet

I am my own poet
And poetry is my song
They are my children singing love songs to my hearing
My children born in the breeze of my consciousness.

Constantly swimming like tadpoles
Through the orifices of my mind
I am the prodigy forgotten
I am reliving my youth in their liveliness.

My love songs reach ears aloft
As untamed, melodious blue jays
I am waiting in the midst of summer
For Fall's sweet breeze and falling leaves.

As they live and breathe Spring
Into the mist at Bay Hallow
Winter's wreaths as young paces follow
I am without haunting or fear.

For my children shall live beyond my years,
And make me immortal.

Yolanda R. Whitted

EX UMBRA 41

I Love You

What does "I love you" taste like?

Does it taste like the saltiness of your earlobes?

Or the cherry Chapstick on your lips?

Does it taste like your favorite spaghetti?

Or the southern-style sweet tea left on your tongue?

Does it taste like your fingers dipped in honey?

Or your chest after you finish lifting weights?

Does it taste like the love we make?

Or the Dasani water we drink afterwards?

What does "I love you" feel like?

Does it feel like your warm hands against my cool skin?

Or does it feel like your kisses on my forehead?

Does it feel like your hands rubbing my lower legs?

Or your body against my body when we first met?

Does it feel like the butterflies you brought to life inside my belly?

Or the seeds you plan to plant in my womb?

Does it feel like the love we make?

Or the way we sleep side-by-side afterwards?

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

What does “I love you” look like?
Does it look like your dimpled smile?
Or your soft, jet-black head full of curls?
Does it look like your sexy, confident swagger?
Or your “serious” face when you think about the future?
Does it look like your rock-hard biceps?
Or the ‘SexyDex’ tattooed on your right upper-arm?
Does it look like the love we make?
Or the way our bodies blend as one afterwards?

What does “I love you” sound like?
Does it sound like the way you say my name?
Or the ringtone I picked out just for you?
Does it sound like the sweet messages you leave on my voicemail?
Or your jealous sighs when other guys try to talk to me?
Does it sound like the beat of my heart in your presence?
Or the silence we share between intimate stares?
Does it sound like the love we make?
Or the way we whisper in each other’s ears afterwards?

“I love you” must taste, feel, look and sound like YOU.

A. Mcrae

EX UMBRA 41

God Spoke To Me

I awoke to the sound of thunder
And the splatter of rain
The howling of a train
God spoke to me that night.

I could hear the boom in his voice
I asked him to talk to me
God spoke to me that night.

He said hold on
Be strong
It won't be long
Sincere redemption is almost here.

Dominique R. Battle

OUT OF THE SHADOWS



EX UMBRA 41

African Queens

Where are my African Queens?
Hard times got these chicks chasing cream
With no hope and no dreams
Money got you color blind
Cause it's the root of all evil
She got rent due
But you spend your last dollar chasing the night scene
Got kids, but they call your momma "momma"
She's had more men than Lifestyles
Baby girl, you come from a tribe of African Queens
But you giving it up for a small fee
If only big momma could see you now
She's probably turning over in her grave
I know life is a struggle
And you feel like you're in a deep hole with no way out
Open your heart to the Lord
I know He will listen
With all the Devil's devilish ways that you love to follow
Whoever would love life and see good days
Must keep his tongue from evil.
Where are my African Queens?
I'm no saint, don't get me wrong
Just trying to show you that there's a better way
So when you get your life together, here's my number.
Baby girl, give me a call
Where are my African Queens?

Roderick Heath

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Afraid to Love Again

“Heartbreak...it’s a trip”

At first I thought I loved him
Believed he loved me too.
Thought I was his one and only
Too naïve to see the truth.
I thought I was his true love
I thought I was his friend.
The truth, it hurt so badly
I’m afraid to love again.

My friends, they tried to warn me
My family they did too.
My conscience told me better
My heart made me a fool.
Don’t fall in love so quickly
Watch to who your love you send.
Trust me, heartbreak, it is painful
You’ll be afraid to love again.

Brittany N. Brooks

EX UMBRA 41

The Good Taker

Last night he came over. His dimpled smile was the first thing I saw. He gently swept past me and laid his Sean Jean jacket on my twin size bed. He then sat down in the desk chair and summoned me to him.

I had already spent two hours waiting for his arrival. When the clock finally hit two after an excruciatingly long day in class, I jumped on the shuttle and headed back to Privatized. I then took a long, hot shower and threw on a Baby Phat tee and some Seven jeans. Then I did my Arts & Humanities homework and studied for my Spanish test.

I tried to focus, but my mind kept wandering back to that day I met him in the Student Union. He was sitting outside with some other guys looking like a project prince in a Tommy Hilfiger sweat suit. He smiled at me. I smiled back. While I went downstairs to check my mail, he followed me. I smelled him before I saw him. He smelled like brown sugar and molasses. When I turned around, I got an eyeful of that dimpled smile. He didn't even have to ask for my number. I took his phone from the case clipped to his hip and added my name and number to the contact list. Then I gently slid the phone back in the case, letting my fingers linger on his hip a little longer than necessary. Then I just smiled and walked away. No words were spoken, but our body language was speaking loud and clear.

The next day he called me. I was studying for my chemistry exam when my Sony Ericsson went off. I smiled, hoping it was him. When I heard that sweet voice for the first time I smiled even harder. I swear I could smell that brown sugar

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

and molasses king through the phone lines. We talked about where we were from, why we came to NCCU and what we like to do for fun. After about an hour, he suggested that we hook up to enjoy each other's company, so I told him to come to my room tomorrow after class.

Now here he was, sitting in my room, smiling with that dimpled smile and I almost forgot where I was and who I was. Then he licked his lips and whispered to me, "Come closer." I came closer.

He grabbed me by the wrists and turned me around so that my back was facing him. Then he held my hips and guided them to his lap. I just sat there, trying not to breathe; trying not to move. We sat just like that for a while, listening to people scream outside the window. A rerun of the 'Steve Harvey Show' was on, so I kept my eyes focused on that. I was watching it. He was watching me. Then he took his index finger and ran it up and down my spine until my body trembled. Did I tell him that was my weak spot? If I did, I didn't remember.

After a while I got up and sat on the bed. He followed. The way he stared at me seemed like he was looking *through* me straight to my thoughts. Right then, I wished I'd had on my camouflaged hat so that I could hide them from him, but it was in the closet and my legs were too weak to stand, let alone walk.

EX UMBRA 41

My mind was racing. This was the turning point. I looked at him and saw the longing in his eyes. I knew what he wanted without him even asking. Should I? Could I? Would I?

This man-child sent so many thoughts through my mind that I had to close my eyes and sigh. I think he noticed my tension because he put his hand on the small of my back and rubbed until I relaxed. Then he lay down on the bed and patted the space where he wanted me to lie.

I gave up on waiting and thinking. I decided that just because I had only known him for two days didn't mean that I should wait. For once I wanted to follow my heart and my body. For once I just wanted to forget all the rules of dating and the thin line between a woman and a hoe. For once I wanted to enjoy a sexual experience without second guessing myself.

So I lay down. Then he put his arms around me and held me so tight I couldn't breathe—wouldn't breathe. I just lay in his arms and let all the pain, all the doubts, all the worries, all the hurt, all the stress, all the problems, all the everything, just go out of me. I let him have all of my pain, and he gladly received it.

In the very next moment, the sun was coming up and his arms were still around me. He still smelled like sugar and molasses. We were both still dressed. I moved slightly and he moved along with me. In that moment I knew that all men weren't

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

bad. I knew that all men weren't dogs. I knew that some took your body and some took your pain. This one took my pain. This one made me believe again.

Around ten o'clock, he got up, hugged me and then left. He came by himself, but he left with a part of me.

I saw him a couple of weeks later at the Student Union. While I was checking my mail, I smelled that familiar sugar and molasses smell. I turned. He smiled. I smiled. Then I took his phone off his hip and typed 'thank you' on his screen and then placed it back in the case, allowing my fingers to again linger on his hip a little longer than necessary. But it was cool 'cause he was a good taker.

Angela N. Haile

EX UMBRA 41

Newsflash

Deep eyes and curly crown
Give you a noble air.
Into my every dream you drown,
You must not be aware.

Your laugh and figure are my lust
There's peril in your hips
Just two things are more dangerous
Your words and your lips.

I try to make some proud display
But stumble in your wake,
And always have something to say
Until my voice, you take.

I'm weakened by your every thing, I have to let you go
Before I left, you clipped my wings with the words, "I know."

Joslyn Bloomfield

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Search for the Perfect Man

I met a man
He was handsome
He was sexy
But he was not intelligent

I met a man
He was intelligent
He was sexy
But he was not handsome

I met a man
He was intelligent
He was sexy, And
He was extremely handsome
But he didn't like women

I began to realize
That the all-elusive, perfect man
Does not exist

Instead I began to accept
The intelligent, sexy
Handsome-to-me man
That
Was perfect for me

I realize that just as beauty
Is in the eye of the beholder
So is perfection

Karen Bethea

EX UMBRA 41

Symbolism and Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"

Voltaire said, "We adore, we invoke, we seek to appease, only that which we fear."¹ Ancient man found himself living within a dangerous and mysterious world full of powerful, capricious forces of nature that both gave and took life without explanation. Through religion, man sought to explain this terrible² world and to find ways to improve his chances of surviving within it. It is the power of religion and how it dies that is the focus of Shirley Jackson's, "The Lottery." Using abundant symbols, she explores religion's origins, creed³, functions, and the forces that can bring about its demise. She centers her exploration on a black box symbolizing religion and, through characters, proceeds to trace religion's integrals of life, death and belief and how religion must adapt to a changing world or lose its meaning and fall into blind superstition. In the expiring of a religion, the illuminated understanding of the faithful inevitably becomes the blind superstition of the ignorant.

That the "*black wooden box*"⁴ is the central symbol of the lottery is made clear when it is set "*in the center of the*

¹ Tripp, 711

² "Terrible" in its original sense, meaning *formidable, dreadful*. (Thompson, 942)

³ "Creed...1. A set of principles or beliefs. 2 system of religious belief (Thompson, 198)

⁴ Jackson, 263

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

square."⁵ The box's black color represents the core, existential mystery that confronted ancient man and gave rise to his religions. Its shape—a box—represents creed's function of forming a religious paradigm by imposing structure and order *upon* that mystery. Its material—wood—represents the belief⁶ that creates and forms this structure. That this box is *open* at the top symbolizes religion's promise of illumination for the faithful of the structure within and underlying the existential unknown.

Only four characters directly attend to the box: Mr. Summers, who "*arrived in the square carrying the black wooden box*"⁷; Mr. Graves, who places the three legged stool down for the box to sit upon; and "*Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, [that] held the black box securely on the stool...*"⁸ These four characters represent the three forces that are necessary for the integrity of a religious paradigm. Mr. Summers represents the Life force of the religion. He is both the drive of the religion to continue to exist and the better life promised to believers who keep religious creed central to their lives: "*The lottery was conducted—as were the square dances, the teenage club, the Halloween program—by Mr. Summers, who had time and energy to devote to civic*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ "Belief...2. Mental acceptance of a proposition...as true, on the ground of authority or evidence." (OED, vol. I, p. 782)

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*, 264

EX UMBRA 41

activities."⁹ Mr. Graves—as his name implies—represents the element of death in religion. It is worth noting that the name "Graves" is a transformation of the word "gravel" (and so foreshadows the inevitable outcome of the lottery) and that "gravel" in turn is derived from the ME word "greyve" meaning "steward"¹⁰ and so reflects death's service to religion and the lottery. He "*followed*" Mr. Summers, as death always follows life. The three-legged stool Mr. Graves brings to the lottery, upon which the black box is set in the center of the square, represents stability and reliability of death¹¹ and its supporting role as the basis of religion. The two Martin men, "*Mr. Martin and his oldest son Baxter*" represent the willingness of the faithful to accept and believe a religious paradigm from generation to generation. This meaning is made clear from the generational relationship of the father and son named "Martin". The word martin means, "a dupe"¹² and a dupe is "*a person who allows himself to be deceived or deluded.*"¹³ If the adherents of a religious creed begin to see their creed as *a worldview* instead of *the world*, if they fail to

⁹ *ibid.*, 263

¹⁰ The interested reader can read about the etymology of the surname Graves in Robb, *Encyclopedia of American Family Names*, under the alphabetical entry for "Graves". Alas, in my excitement over discovering the appropriateness of the meaning of "Graves" and "Hutchinson" I failed to note the page number.

¹¹ The three-legged stool is always stable, there is no rocking possible as with a four legged piece of furniture.

¹² OED, vol. VI, p. 191

¹³ *ibid.* vol. III, p. 721

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

suspend their disbelief and not be “duped” by the paradigm presented, then the religion begins to lose its integrity and meaning and begins its dissolution from a comprehensive creed to a superstitious congeries.

A religion does not and cannot exist in a vacuum. It must revise its creed to remain comprehensive and healthy in the light of new information from the world-at-large or it will devolve. Thus, we’re told that, “*There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here.*”¹⁴ Eventually this process of revision after revision diminishes the religion to the point that it hardly shares any common ground with its original self—so, the author informs us, “*The black box grew shabbier each year; by now it was no longer completely black but splintered badly along one side to show the original wood color and in some places faded or stained.*”¹⁵ The black mystery of existence is no longer mysterious, the religion is shown for the worldview it is and is no longer the source of light and shelter for its believers that it once was. Likewise the *faith* of the religion’s adherents also diminishes; they are unable to suspend disbelief in the face of competing evidence. This is phenomenon is addressed in the line: “*Because so much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded, Mr. Summers had been successful in having slips of paper substituted for the chips of wood that had been used for*

¹⁴ Jackson, 264

¹⁵ *ibid.*

EX UMBRA 41

generations."¹⁶ Individual religious faith—"chips of wood"¹⁷—has changed from being unified with the firm belief that created and formed the religion—symbolized by the wood of the box—to a flimsy, processed byproduct of religious belief: tradition (as symbolized by the slips of paper). "...Young Joe Summers,"¹⁸ symbolizing the Life of the religion, is the one who, "*spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box.*"¹⁹ This line tells us that religion has passed below tradition to something else even more bereft of meaning: blind superstition.

When religion drops to the level of tradition it is nearing its death, It has lost its meaning and its usefulness as a comprehensive worldview; mere "tradition" is the pinnacle of meaning for the believers and ignorant superstition is the norm. "*Some people remembered, there had been a recital of some sort, performed by the official of the lottery*"²⁰ Whatever meaning or creed had once existed has been forgotten, what remains are dead tenets symbolized by, "*a great pile of stones*"²¹; a tossed together heap of dead beliefs that is "*guarded*"²²—clung to for the meaning that they once

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid* 264

¹⁸ *ibid*, 266

¹⁹ *ibid*, 264

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ *ibid.* 263

²² *ibid*

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

possessed. The stones are “smooth and round,”²³ from the passage of time. These pieces of death are hefted in hope that they can still make things better in life, clutched in ignorance because their original meaning is long forgotten. They are hurled blindly in defense of—nothing. They are hurled in defense *against* the enemy of superstition symbolized by Mrs. Hutchinson²⁴: the fire of the heart, spirit and mind that seeks to illuminate the darkness.

The guardians of the faith, the orthodoxy of religion, as symbolized by Old Man Warner²⁵ must resort to merely snide comments and arguments from tradition alone. When Mr. Warner hears that a neighboring village is thinking of giving up the lottery he can only bluster, “*Pack of crazy Fools. Listening to the young folks, nothing’s good enough for them. Next thing you know, they’ll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work anymore...we’d all be eating stewed chickweed and acorns. There’s always been a lottery.*”²⁶ But his warning is too late and lacks any real substance. Already,

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Hutchinson is “derived from the old French first name Hu(gh)e. The name was originally a shortened form of various longer Germanic names that began with the word “hugh,” meaning heart, soul or mind...Irish, Scottish: Derived from the Gai=elic name MacAodha, which is derived from the first name Aodh, meaning fire.” Ross (see footnote 9)

²⁵ “Warner” aside from its straight forward meaning of “one who warns”, is derived from the Germanic words “war(in)” and “Hari”, meaning “sentinel” and “militia” [or “home guard”] respectively. (Robb, 670)

²⁶ Jackson, 266

EX UMBRA 41

*"Some places have given up the lottery,"*²⁷ The villagers are aware that such villages exist and in time will be shown to be doing just fine without the lottery. In the face of overwhelming evidence the villagers may see that they too can do without the lottery and will realize the final words of Mrs. Hutchinson: *"It isn't fair, it isn't right."*²⁸ On that day the light of a new religion will finally and completely replace the dark remnants of old blind superstitions.

Gregory Wilson

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Jackson, 269

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

HBCU

At an HBCU I am challenged to strive for excellence.
I am challenged to do better than my Caucasian peers.
I am told, "They are as better as you let them be."
I am challenged to be the best.
Everyday I am reminded that I am at an HBCU.
I eat what our society can afford.
I read what our society can understand.
I do things in the best interest of our society.
As a result, I learn how to survive,
Make the best out of a situation and stay focused.
At an HBCU, I am challenged to strive for excellence.

Natasha L. Gilliam

EX UMBRA 41

U-Haul

If there were no me there would be no you
I am equilibrium, you beg me to set you straight
I hit your ass with a switch that hurts so deep you cried and no
sound came out
Well, when I cried I had to stifle it, holding your pain in
I'm not the woman you worship
I'm the one that's always down, and you never notice me till
I'm gone
And you don't even know why you miss me
I am a lot of things you never ask for
I'm your mover
A U-Haul, but you don't, I do
You see, I shoulder your pain
I'm a bag lady because you've weighed me down
I help people reach their destinations
Yet don't need help finding mine
I've got problems because they're yours
I do more than carry your burdens
If you let me, I'll carry you
No, I'm no doormat
Just a mixture of empathy and neurosis
All I want is your happiness
Your comfort
Your love
And maybe a tip and a thank you

Joslyn Bloomfield

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Me, Myself and I

If there is strength in numbers
I hope three is enough
Me, Myself and I

I need one moment in time where I'm more than what I
thought I was
Where I'm truly the ruler of my fate
When my thoughts matter
When my heart beats fast with joy
Escape this fear, skip these excuses, forget these lies, subtract
this pain and erase this hate
Begin to feel again, to start recovery and to stop wasting time
Cry?
Why?

If there is strength in numbers
I hope that three is enough
Me, Myself and I

Jamia Green

EX UMBRA 41

A Poem for Rosa Parks

I was tired so I took a seat
Not realizing that I would change history
I was tired so I rested my legs
Not realizing what was about to be said

Rest for the weary
Rest for the weak
It all started when I rested my feet

Here's a little history lesson just for you
Something that many reports did not tell you
This matter was never about my feet
But because I refused to give up my seat!

Now that my purpose is complete
God's called me home to rest my feet
I take my rest in Heaven above
Where I can now fly like a dove

Rest for the weary
Rest for the weak
Never forget why I rested my feet!

Vanessa Jackson

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

In The Closet

Rays struggle through the crevices
And line a face boiling with cold.

The knob blushes, a virgin, it has never been touched
And like the girl, half lives inside, half lives out.

Too afraid of plunging into darkness, she's never seen the
light
And so she sits, mute, with a spear in her side and a drawn
smile on her face.

This place protects her from the people who want to slander,
heckle and sneer
Yet it is too snug for her wings, hopes and ambitions.

She resolves to do nothing, her personal hell, the ultimate
attrition she knows so well
You see, the door is shut, like the hearts of the encaged, the
lips of the endangered and The wild eyes of the resigned.

Joslyn Bloomfield

EX UMBRA 41

Sister Girl, I Pity You

I don't know if you were always this lame, or if now I'm sane or if I lost you somewhere in the game. I hear your comments laced with venom, and Sister Girl, I pity you.

You've been contemplating my complexion, calculating the curl in my kink, unconcerned with the heart that lies beneath my breast.

Measuring the length of my strands instead of the content of my character

Sister Girl, you've been making excuses for my transcending beauty from Mother Africa that seeps deeper than skin deep.

Like money hungry miners you rape my soul searching for diamonds you can keep, and Sister Girl, I pity you.

You've been living a lie and you need to transition to a state of self-love and self-confidence by using your dark and lovely, instead of wishing you were a little less dark and a little more lovely.

Staring at me in awe with your colored contacts, but when you look in the mirror all you see is flaws instead of what God meant you to be.

Don't you know we were meant to keep are heads up high?

Have you ever seen the head turned down on the bust of the famous Queen Nefertiti?

You see me, you see I love myself and so you want to hate me, and for that Sister Girl, I pity you.

Abebe Axum

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Rwanda

One million hearts
One million souls
One day in Rwanda the story goes
The Hutus under Belgian rule
For authority Tutsies were used
Then when one day, the Bells they left
Hutus became the common wealth
And vowed revenge, to every Tutsie death
Man, woman, girl and boy
One million times
I've heard their voice
Are you a Tutsie?
No, not I
For death was certain if yes replied
One million murders
One million times
One million corpses marked "genocide"
As the powers that be stood idly by
Not a word was heard from out of the West
One million cries sparked no interest
May we never sleep, and never dream
Without hearing all those children scream
Rwanda, Rwanda, Rwanda

In 1993, the Hutu tribe in Rwanda killed 800,000 men, women and children belonging to the Tutsie tribe in Rwanda. Two hundred Hutus were killed.

Darryl Harris

EX UMBRA 41

What a Difference a Day Makes

Yesterday I was lonely and unhappy, dissatisfied with myself.
Today I have joy.
I am alone but not lonely, and I cheerfully embrace who I am.

Yesterday I was floundering, searching for a way out,
Attempting to change my circumstances and situation.
Today I am focused.
Instead of changing my circumstances and my situation I have
learned to make my Circumstances and situation work for me.

Yesterday was cloudy, with no real vision.
Today is sunny and clear.
My goals are in sight and my visibility is clear.

Yesterday is gone.
Today is here.

What a difference a day makes.

Karen Bethea

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Soul Cry

The weakness of my mind is overbearing
Shocks of pain rise vastly
The life I live is the only one I can live
Yet the despair of someone else is heart wrenching
Six deaths since my college career started
My heart shedding endless tears of blood
The confusion I show every time I step out of church
This Bible of mine goes straight to my soul
Nerves are a wreck
This empty feeling I cannot escape
A heart fulfilled
Yet so lonely
The salvation of loved ones is always a though
But who am I to minister with this life of mine
Every night I have endless thoughts
Until tears stream through my river
Every night I end my saddened day with a soul cry
Then life starts again

LaKea M. D. Dill



North
Carolina
Central
University