

NANDI

LITERARY MAGAZINE

SPRING 2014

EDITION XVII



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Witkaze's Literary Magazine

SPRING 2014



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Nan-di

[**nahn**-dee]

Nandi is the Queen Mother of the Zulu Nation. Queen Nandi became a legend in the history of the Zulu people as the mother of Shaka, a great warrior of southern Africa. Her concern and inspiration contributed to his stability and daring. The Zulu people today speak her name “Nandi,” meaning

A WOMAN OF HIGH ESTEEM.

Nandi Publication

May, 7th 1997

Vol. 5, No. 2

Celebrating Women of **COLOR**

We see them every day. We marvel at the many diverse ways in which they present themselves to the world. Young and old, they all have a creative way of expressing just who they are. From the little girl in the cowboy boots and tutu that draws with great imagination, to the grandmother with the silver hair and tricked out walking stick who sings in the church choir, self-expression has been a way to show what exists on the surface, and if we pay close attention, to what lies beneath.

From the first day I set foot on this campus in August 1998 to today, I never cease to be amazed at the affluence, ingenuity, and beauty, of the creative spirit of my sisters of color. At one time a small segment of the institution, now a larger part and significant influence in the everyday faces of those you see around. I expected that these young women would be intelligent and capable when it came to book study. I had no idea of the talents hidden beneath when it came to the arts.

Women of color are stepping forward to show not only their sense of self-worth and belonging but also their ability to create beauty and elegance in the way they express themselves. Prepare yourself for a short journey into the creative side of a few of these “Women of Color”, and keep your eyes peeled for the futures of these phenomenal artists and those yet to come. They Rock!

Barbara Washington '01

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Where is the Hope?

Kebreht Walker

I've got a tree on my back
and it spells out the word

J

U

D

G

E

M

E

N

T

And I ask myself every night when I close my eyes
waiting for this neglectful sunrise

Where is the hope?

Is it behind the girl with blonde hair who
gives up the right to care for all people of
all lands because her skin is no darker than a fake tan?

Where is the hope?

Is it behind the girl whose mouth is sewed shut
because our sisters use politically correct words to cut?

What happened to the sisterhood?

These hands that used to hold mine have become a fist
this fist that beats on a keyboard like a wardrum

Everytime someone uses the word "um?"

Where is the hope?

Is it behind the girl who searches for a rainbow world
but all she gets are ouches and oops?

Oh my heart how it droops to think of a world without love
but seems as if I am in chains by master on the plantation of exclusion
this hate has become a lullaby and I am cradled by an Earth Mother
who secretly hates me because my hair has no wonderful kinks and curls
In her eyes I have sold my soul
But in my mind my hair is not my whole
So I ask my sisters of knowledge and pride,
where is the hope?
Or must I continue to hide?

Coming Out

Yehimi Cambron



Amber Alert

Breonca Hackney

Amber Alert: Someone is missing in a white range rover.

I know I've heard a lot of Amber Alerts over the last couple of months
but when did people start to lose their identity?

I still hear the mirror whispering to me that my skin is black and beautiful.
In Ntozake Shange's words this is a poem without any words
because I am inside my skin...

Professing words of an unwritten poem...

This is a poem unwritten for the African American girls' voices
that will never be heard in the sounds of the bombing
of the 16th Street Baptist Church

This silence is for every African American woman
whose skin color and gender was discriminated against.

This is for the six year old girl who declares that God is her mother.

This is for the Freedom Rider who never wrote his last poem
or ever saw his moment of freedom.

This silence is for transgenders in a world that constantly tells them
that living in their skin is wrong.

This is for the woman that killed five in a car accident
and not quite sure if she can ever stop hearing the breaks of the turning tires.

For I am who I say I am and I'm fine and free in the skin I'm in.

I've been here forever.

This is for the Amber Alert that found all of them safe in their skin.

Some aren't missing but living inside of their own skin
whose poetry meant more than living in a world full of Amber Alerts.

I LOvE HeR

Ikeranda Smith

For no one particular reason
but yet for many
the main one being
Simply... because she is
....I love her
Unrestricted without conditions
Minus heavily weighted request
Or pensive petitions
....I love her
Free of prideful resistance
Now ever present
She need not even beckon
For my submission
....I love her
For her Love ...
I'm not above supplications
There are no second thoughts
or hesitation
Just patience
You see..I just love her
Sometimes beyond reason
For her I'd intrepidly trespass
And perform treacherous
Acts of treason
Betray even my own being
Myself I've forsaken
For she has me helplessly captured
Forever taken
The me without she is now a blur

To her being my soul now bends and curls
If you ask me who I am
I will simply respond.... "I'm hers"
because she is the melody and pulse
To my heart's song
The raging wind as my passion storms
My inner peace and soothing calm
She's the life lines etched upon my palms
She is my everything and I love her
I love her....

Pinups

Brittney Jackson



Sista Girls and the F Word

Martha Wallace

Champagne *Flutes* filled with Mimosas, sparkling and sweet,
Gold rimmed cups filled with *fragrant* hot coffee,
Fingertips pluck a juicy grape from under the ripe honeydew chunks.
Smoked salmon and cream cheese tickle our palates,
bringing “mmmmmm’s” to our *faces*
Feeling tropical heat is *freakishly* seductive, Caribbean breeze, cooling.
Looking out at the gently rolling azure waves.
Fresh sun bronzed *faces*, cruising along.
The gentle swaying of the ship mimics the moving of our round hips,
Calypso beat, dancing until daybreak.
My sisters and I *fabulously free* to frolic,
we revel in our *femininity, faith, favor, and fruitfulness.*
Sister Fayth has the *flair, forming* custom jewelry *full* of multihued stones;
stunning tiger’s eye, sapphires, rubies, and amethysts,
Sister Freesia massages the confusions from your head and body;
Infusing positive affirmations as *Frankincense* and Myrrh envelope me.
My *feisty free* spirit guides the pen which *flows*, pouring out
fresh memoirs; *freedom* to be uniquely me.
Inspiration streams *freely* from tongue tip and fingers, sweet *fluidity*
like hot caramel *flows* down an ice cream c-hill.
We are re-*finéd, feminine, and fabulous.*
The Universe feels our beats, knows our dances and applauds our *fevor*.
sweet strawberries *float* in divine champagne *flutes*, chocolate rivers *flow*,
flood the senses, traces on my lips and *fingertips*

Irish Bards

Courtney Taylor

Somewhere in Dublin, schoolboys
without ink pens
are studying the poetry of Haicéad,
asked to read one line and pass
the shared text book down the table
to the next boy
and so on

In this way the eight boy
will remember that
the edge of my intellect was a thing to fear
such as the last boy has *the hate they bear my people*
to carry home in chagrin
like the Irish Catholics before him.

These boys retire to ramshackle flats in Rathmines
with single mothers dripping
in lye- another peasant remedy
for oppression. In the daily paper they read
that just across the Atlantic, a black widow
has lathered her eyes, flying blind
to the body of her bullet slain King
in Memphis.

Now colored boys want to rewrite America
with the blood of a Georgia preacher man,
tame *the slavish hateful shore* of the South
with a sealed casket and patulous mouth.
The schoolhouse in his hometown
will burn the flag to ignite a Hughes,
ashes of a dream deffered
to cherish more like a phoenix
for now.

But their teacher reminds them that
even the bards of Ireland were banned, their
mouths *stitched with twisted string*.
The boys have no pens to write that down.
They'll forget it anyhow.



Whitewash

Vylencia Morton

Smooth Away

Safron Smith

Smoothing out the creases of my skin, as if to get rid of the flaws
As if to get rid of some injustice
Some embarrassment
As if to get rid of some shame
Somewhere in society the world has told me that my skin isn't beautiful
Better yet, that the color of my skin isn't beautiful enough
That my black skin isn't up to par
I smooth out the creases, yet they don't fade away
The black in me seems to always stay
It's so pronounced I cannot hide it
It's so obvious that I cannot deny it
Smoothing away my skin to dodge the oppression
Smoothing away trying to make it disappear
But I realize the creases on my skin aren't going anywhere
I have to learn to embrace them
Take charge of the rights bestowed upon me at birth
Fight back against society
Use my skin, the creases and the color of my skin as a silent weapon
As a crafty tool-
One that is available to me
One that empowers me
One that I look at as a reminder of my differences that make me unique
I am black and I am comfortable in my skin

Ronnie's Rendition

Tanzania Nevels

I watched as you gathered your life up
And put it in a box
A Red box with no lock and no clock
To time the moments of ecstasy and pain
For within this small space the original man was contained
Hungry to be free
To be among the living finally!

So I went to bed
With the music in my head
Symphonies of sorrows cuddled up to
Ballads, which spoke of hopeful tomorrows
Some Funk-a-centric Afro-rhythmic
Baseline thumpin'
Adrenalin pumpin'
Watching the waves jumpin'
Groove that makes you move
As you lose yourself in the
Some kind of Blue
Hue, of a
Damn! I had no clue
That's the real YOU

Play yo music man!
Play yo music man!
Play yo music man!

For in that instant
Between heaven and hell
I saw your soul
A masterpiece to behold
As the melodies unfold
I see the movement
I hear the sound
I feel the beat
Runnin' in my feet
Clappin' in my hand
Joy of a song
Expanding into a conscious musical
Performed in the key of life

So in the mean time...
Get out the box man!
Get out the box man!
Get out the box man!

Play yo music man!
Play yo music man!
Play yo music man!

Pulse

Mia Jones-Walker



Why Don't You Love Me?

Désirée M. Jamerson

"Why don't you love me like I love you?" she asks me.

Have you ever been asked that question? Just how do you answer that?

In my mind I say, "Because I can't. I no longer have the capability to love another. For that was stolen 2 years ago. Taken away from me like death steals life.

I cannot love you like you love me because I am not you. I do not need what you need. I do not feel what you feel. I told you what you could expect when you starting dealing with me. I'm sorry that you thought things would change, but you must let me be.

Let me continue to be good to you, and treat you the way you want to be treated. I don't do any more or less than before. So how did feelings get wrapped up into this? Don't we have a good thing now, baby? Why ask for more?"

Again, and again, and again she asks, "Why don't you love me like I love you?"

Pressing and pressing and pressing as if my answer would soon be impressing.

I reply, "Well it's plain to see. You are not her. And we are not we. I hate to say it like that, but you kept asking me this same fucking question."

Now you are crying. I'm so sorry baby, I know that shit hurts.

But it's hurting me more. I'm the one who is stuck to the floor. I try to pick myself up, but I keep falling back down. You are a diamond, but I can't keep your shine.

And then I remember a rule that I forgot, "Never ask a question you don't want to know the answer to."

I was not prepared for what I heard.

So I had to put the mirror down, till I could face the truth.

A Dose of Reality for the Ill-informed Woman

Anastasia Carter

They don't ask for caramel, chocolate, or butter pecan,
They rather vanilla that only reaches this kind of perfection by sun-tan.
No hate to the standard of beauty that my sisters try to live up to,
You know, the blonde hair, contoured noses,
and weave that women go through hell to get to?
But settling to be a dime amongst the dozen
when you're the queen of queens is sickening,
Mimicking the very people who mock you for trying to fit in.
Realize that color is beautiful.
Washing away your look in an attempt to be regular is pitiful.
The way the sunlight glistens on your skin is a rarity,
One that the others could never achieve,
yet you imitate them, while they laugh hysterically.
Don't be a fool and let them dupe you into thinking that you are less than.
Bland pastels are never the first to be chosen out the box, Amen?
We'll chalk up your aspirations to be Becky as a fling,
Because when it comes down to it, color is everything.

Unforgettable

Mia Jones-Walker



Auntie Sun

Alexis Henry

the Sun did reach down and touch me.
stone cold, I was
hard, petrified with hatred

the Sun,
She shivered at the sight of me--my coldness,
trampled faith, ruined innocence.
I lied there in a bed of their remains

She dropped down into my abyss, she brought life
and restored warmth –
warm, earthy, healing hands—and humming, there was humming,
She was humming a rhythm into the corpse of my heart
, the corpse of Her
dearest child
who'd renounced her will to live

many die of coldness,
but the Sun did reach down –
warm hands, hugging, holding, caressing, holding
rocking, soothing

-- and save
Me. Auntie Sun did reach down
and save
Me.

In Honor Of Trayvon Martin, Islan Nettles, and Rekia Boyd

Alexis Henry

When america invites you to dine
they do not tell you that
it is the corpse
of your Sista and Brotha
upon the platter before You

.

You no longer
have to enter through the
back door
to sit at the table

,

but it is still not
progress.



Ek Balam

Courtney Taylor

Thankfulness

Alexandra Swann

She with historic hips and endless eyes
though her children have been taken from her,
she has seen victory.

indeed, Black woman, you have seen it all.
pain, love, abandonment, and great sorrow.

the tears you cry are heavy and silent because you don't want us to worry
but Black woman, we see you weeping,
and we do worry.

she whose dreams always tell the future
the woman, the angel, who continues to bloom
despite the heat, she is cool, and despite the rain, she refuses to drown.

Black woman, we are always praying for you
hoping our words will be the catalysts for your success.
the last thing you want is for us to see you cry, woman
but we see you and are not ashamed,
we love you even when you are weak, Black woman.

You who are wise beyond your years, great carrier of history.
and language. and laughter. and tradition.

Sharer of wisdom, you are glorious.

Although some try to stifle you, your light still shines on us.

We feel the warm radiance and we appreciate your existence.

Black woman whose love is our love,

Thank you.

Look Into the Mirror, Black Girl

Gabrielle Shepard

Gaze into the eyes that haven't always looked back.

Deep with painful strength.

The tears of a race,

The love of a sisterhood,

Not pearls.

Black diamonds.

Stroke your finger along your smooth skin,

A thick blanket of history stretched over humanity's buried bones

Black liquid velvet pouring over your

Embracing arms,

Strong legs,

Plump breasts.

Look with eyes that have lived the history.

Feel with hands that have broken the chains.

Look into the mirror, black girl.

See what I see.



Criminalize This!

Yehimi Cambron

Bar Room Bellas

Chelsey Jenkins

green eyes stare into mine
as we brace ourselves for
whiskey shots
with beer for chaser,
a consequence of 10 dollars in your pocket
and a lazy plaid wearing bartender.

We don't know the world yet.
alcohol to drown the breast milk
on our fleshy pink tongues.
screaming about lost loves
and loves unfound
a little too loud.
other drunks share their squinty eyes

21 years stupid
but wiser than 18 years misguided.
We know better now
and we eat while we drink,
to avoid hugging pissy germ infested toilets
that haven't been cleaned since New Year's
and its November.

Instead, we drink too fast.
too eager to have that first legal taste.
when we're older we'll savor,
a consequence of wisdom

and hangovers. Until then
we stuff our faces with tater tots
and other fried critters and chug PBRs
hoping to suffocate our faint cries
for mother's love.

we're too young to handle the truths of adulthood
so we balance on the tightrope
between independence and
parents' wallets.
Young, dumb and potential
all wrapped in one.

The Journey Taken

Randal LeDet

My sneakers

Went to school
Fought Converse for dissing Nike

My sneakers

Finished their homework
Went to Morehouse

My sneakers

Entered a trap house
Trusted a stranger

My sneakers

Smoked Weed
Drank grape gin

My sneakers

Had sex with Airwalk
Diminished their character

My sneakers

Passed out on the couch
Woke up in a bed

My sneakers

Grateful to be able to stand
Traded in for heels

My heels

Graduated from college
Walked across that forbidden stage

Hands of an Immigrant

Yehimi Cambron



Women Unparalleled

Brittney Brown

Women of color

Intelligent.

Gorgeous.

Unparalleled.

With sunbathed, radiant, and beautiful skin;

hues on a spectrum that don't have a beginning or end.

Women who are hard as weathered rock at the bottom of the sea floor

And soft as fall leaves gently descending to the ground.

Hurt and pain has made them strong to rise above their adversaries.

Women of color with their innate confidence,

Shown in the grace of their walk and

The love in their voices as every time they speak.

Women of color around the world,

Be proud of who you are,

For there is no other who compares.

Daylight

Asha Boston



The Conglomeration

Sofía Barrera

One:

Aida

*turn on shower
hot water flows over
skin cold to touch
goose-bumps, perked nipples.
step into room,
wipe away fog from mirror
and eyes
and stare
into pink skin,
pink whites of eyes.
touch nose, cheeks, ears and throat
feel foreign-
alien
in skin scrubbed raw
in eyes too green
from crying.
open mouth as if to speak
but words stick to teeth and tongue
and bounce from mirror
to naked knees
to the trash.
feel shoulder bones touch spine
see chest bones reach like*

*open hands like gaping wounds
for the words
for the bile
to purge spit and semen
from thighs
and fingers
and hair.*

Have you been crying?

Shut up.

Here we are, again. I'm over at your house at the crack of dawn, and you're in a towel sitting on the floor. Your room is a reflection of your soul: sparse, minimalistic. You have a bed with a thin quilt over the mattress. It's nothing special, nothing remarkably beautiful. Just some faded blue flowers on a neutrally patterned, holey background. There's nothing covering the iron of your bed just like there's nothing but skin covering the rich brown of your collar bone. You have one lamp with a compact fluorescent bulb. I swear to you every time I catch you reading at night you'll go blind. You have one table with one drawer that holds two pens, a diary, and a copy of *Wuthering Heights*. Your linoleum floor is cold and bare except for a rug you keep in front of the dresser. I think that has flowers on it too.

You're in a towel sitting on the floor. Your shoulder is bruised, your skin of your lip is open and leaking red. I help dry you off. I don't ask any questions. It's just the way things are. I know you won't answer me anyway. I gingerly run the towel over your boney shoulders, your collar bone, your breasts. You're so much smaller than me, I think. But, I know that's not true. You're 5'7" boney and beautiful, but I never feel small when I'm near you. I always feel sort of endless. I imagine trees sometimes feel this way.

My hands leave white marks on your cold, naked body as I lift you up. I smell bourbon on your breath, in your hair. It's unusual considering I only see you drinking beer. I'm not drunk you know, you say. I don't say anything, because

I know if you're not already you will be soon. I open your drawer and look for your oversized t-shirts. They aren't too hard to find considering you only have two. I grab a pair of underwear while I'm at it, and I dress you.

I'm not drunk you know, you say. I don't say anything. I just rub the bridge of my nose and breathe deep the scent of bourbon and jasmine. I try to forget who you are. I reduce you to faded flowers, bourbon, ice, violence. You're so slight, but so violent. I never understood the meanness you have deep inside you. You seem too breakable to be so fierce. I feel like I could break you if wanted to, but I never feel like I want to- even when you're drunk, hurt, and crying.

I looked at you looking at me. You're there sitting up and babbling about men and women and lights and sounds and tastes and feelings I'll never know. It was then I realized you were an island. The truth is, I want you and your men and your women and your lights. I want your sounds, tastes and feelings. I want to know, but you're an island. So, I crawl back into my head and I close my eyes and rub the bridge of my nose.

Here we are again. You're bleeding from your lip because you keep picking at it. Am I bleeding? You keep asking. I want to tell you, Yes, you're bleeding. I want to tell you, Stop picking at your lip, Ai. I want to tell you. You light a cigarette. Your smoke comes in puffs and halted exhalations. You're trying to blow smoke rings at the smoke detector and I'm sitting on your cold linoleum wishing you had bought another rug. You pass me your bloodstained cigarette and we share a moment of mutual consent. Your hand lingers on mine, and you look fiercely in my eyes. You tell me, I'm not drunk you know.

Maybe, this time, if I kiss you where it's soft- maybe, this time, if I kiss you where your hip bone meets your skin. Maybe, this time, if I let you coddle my body against your own. Maybe, this time, if you-

You're parting the seas for me- you're parting your lips for me- you're pulling so gently on my fingers, on my waist. I feel entirely too heavy. I want your sounds, tastes and feelings. I want to swim in the lightness of your body. The dawn is breaking, and I kiss you where it's soft. I kiss your bloody mouth, and I feel the steadiness of my hands as I cradle your hips, your waist. You're

laying there on the bed, and I'm feeling like I want to sink into your soul. You move my hands to your thighs. I move them away and somehow my knee is between your legs and I'm half-standing, half-laying on you and I pull away.

I say, I'm going to make you some coffee. You take my hand in yours as if to pull me back. I feel the greatness of something untouchable and unbreakable, something disturbed by the blood pounding in my head. I realize how small I am. As you play with the tips of my fingers I feel how long your fingers are; I see how mannish they look when your nails aren't painted. I wonder what you think of me and my pear shaped body, my too large breasts and too narrow hips. I'm going to make you some coffee, I say. You let go, and you say, You have such pretty fingers. I walk away and I smile. The day breaks.

Two:

Catlin

tomatoes

*grow along the rocks by the shore
by the light house where
I used to sit with my legs
outstretched to the salted air.*

tomatoes

*red and orange against
blues and greens and the soft
brown of my skin
what did my mother say about tomatoes?*

tomatoes

*are faces that want to be close to the sun
and I am a body reaching, choosing
a face from the vine and throwing
it into the sea.*

Ai is asleep when I bring her coffee. I set the mug down on her dresser and pull the tattered quilt over her shoulders. I don't think she even notices it's cold. I don't think she notices much of anything. I take the mug and head straight to the patio, or the terrace as Ai calls it. She's got all kinds of things growing in that little space. Four feet by six feet of green, green, green.

There's barely any separation between apartments and their balconies, so I know no one's awake at 5:30 except the neighbor's dog. It keeps looking at me with these sad brown eyes like it wants my coffee or my attention. I feed it once a week, and I think Ai feeds it every day. God knows what she gives it. Whatever this dog gets he gets from me and Ai, and it makes me sad. I leave the balcony. I can't take care of the dog today.

I stay just behind the glass where the dog can't look at me, and where I can't see it. I keep wondering if It knows I'm there feeling pity and anger for it. I have the desire to go the apartment over, knock down the door, go straight to the balcony and take that dog for myself. But what do I know about dogs?

I stay behind the glass sipping Ai's coffee. She takes it black, so I'm drinking it black. Terrible taste. She drinks this nasty Ethiopian dark coffee because she believes it has the ability to keep her skin young and her poetry bold. But what do I know about the power of coffee? I have no rituals except coming here in the wee hours of the night once sometimes four times a month to make sure Ai hasn't killed herself. I mean that figuratively and literally and with sincerity. Sometimes Ai scares me.

I can hear the dog whining. It knows I'm here behind the glass looking at things that aren't it. I go to the kitchen and grab some cheddar cheese from the counter. It likes it when I feed it cheese.

Ai doesn't like that I call the dog It. She says, Call it something beautiful because it has a soul. I don't know what to call it, so I call it It. I throw It the cheese and It is pleased. So, It lays back down and goes to sleep, and I can sit outside in the cool and the gray in peace.

There's not much room to put my feet down out here. Ai's tomatoes are

making their way from the pot to the railing to the sliding glass door. They're creep, creep, creeping like they want to make their way into the house and wrap themselves around the legs of tables and chairs. There's a few tomatoes ripe enough to pick. I pick one and I hold it and it takes me back to Coweta county in the summer time.

When I was a little girl, I used to watch my granddaddy garden. It would be every summer Saturday that he would till Georgia clay- churn it, stir it with manure and river silt until the earth was a strange jumble of orange and black. He was a great conjurer who commanded infertile dirt to yield shoots of green that would turn into cukes, squash, pole beans, jalapeño peppers, daffodils, daisies and mums.

I would hide in the trees surrounding his garden and every time he turned his back to put away a hose or excavate a trowel from the shed I would sneak to the pole beans and eat them. At dinner that night, he'd pass my nana the rolls and say, A little bunny's been eatin' my pole beans, Nana. My nana would smile and look at me. She'd say, That silly bunny best not eat my green beans.

My granddaddy and I were great lovers of tomatoes. The tomatoes from his garden were the best I had ever eaten until I met Ai. Anyway, we'd go out together- me with a woven basket and him with a plastic bucket- and pick tomatoes in the warm of the morning. He said, Take tomatoes from the vine when they're yella-orange. And I did. As I picked their blushing faces I whispered to them. I whispered to the baby green tomatoes and the vines. I'd tell them how I wanted them to cover the fence and creep into my room.

After picking there was washing and air drying and impatience. At about noon granddaddy and I would place the damp tomatoes in the window sill where he said they would drink the sun and become red and be ready to be eaten. I'd come over throughout the week and stare in wonder at how the colors changed.

Now, I'm sitting on this porch holding a tomato like it's my heart and I can feel the morning air condensating on its skin. I start picking Ai's tomatoes while they're yella-orange and I go inside. I put them on her window sills and I listen to the quiet. There's so much quiet in Ai's apartment. The walls are

blank, the furniture is sparse, the carpet in the living room is thread- bare. There are small pictures tacked to the great expanse of wall, but that only makes it look more empty. I feel empty.

I go to the kitchen and dump out the coffee. I take a tomato and put it in my purse. I don't where I think I'm going, but I have to leave here and her and It. I have to leave right now, but I don't. I put my purse by the door and go to Ai's room. She's sleeping. Her hands are clutching at her shoulders like she's afraid if she let's go she'll disappear. I leave her a note by her lamp and I blow her a kiss. And I leave. I swear I'll never come back, but I always swear and promise things I can't keep. So, I leave. I don't want to come back.

Proud

Asha Boston



The Eighth Wonder

Karmen Cook

“How are you two doing this afternoon?”

“We’re doing just fine! How are you?”

“I’m great, thank you. My name is Karmen and I’ll be serving you today. Can I get you —”

“Karmen, where are you from?”

“Monroe County, GA.”

“No, I mean where does your family originate from?”

“I’m not actually sure of that. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, just because you’re so different. I mean, you seem so poised and confident. And your hair is so curly. You sparked my curiosity.”

* * *

I’ve always thought that my curly hair came from my grandmother, but if it is that important to you, I guess I could tell you that my great-great (way back) grandfather may have had something to do with it. I imagine that his hair was always neatly combed and presentable, as he was the son of a plantation owner. That hair mixed with my great-great (way back) grandmother’s likely kinky hair had a major impact on what you are so fascinated with today. I try to keep it straightened while I’m working so that you won’t feel the urge to touch my hair as you’re in the process of asking my permission to do so. My apologies for tempting you today. Would you mind passing me that glass? It’s a little hard to reach across this table to fill it with water. Height was not one of the things that I inherited.

I carry myself with confidence and ooze intelligence because I am both of those things. Another customer asked me if I was from somewhere in Europe. I was extremely confused by it. I’m not a really big geography person, so later I just assumed that black European women were super classy in order to turn what was an awkward moment into a compliment. Can I get you another glass of sweet tea, ma’am?

What’s that? Do I know the musical significance of my name? Of course I do. Would you like to hear about the time that I chose not to perform La Habanera for my district piano recital because I thought it would be too

corny? I won that year, and every year after. I won every year before that too, but you didn't ask about that part. I could tell you about the miniature busts that rest atop my piano when I play. Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin. They all stare breathlessly to see what I'll churn out next.

I also learned how to play the saxophone during my middle school years, although I regret never learning how to play my favorite song "Ribbon in the Sky" by Stevie Wonder. On my wedding day, I'll just ask my cousin EJ to play for me as I walk down the aisle. I passed my saxophone along to him and he's worked wonders with it ever since. My sister Kirsten passed it along to me. She nicknamed it Chipmunk Holyfield. No one is sure why. What do I not play? I don't know how to play the guitar yet, but I'm working on it. I would take lessons, but I'm here working most of the time so that will have to wait. My seventeen-year-old niece plays guitar and sings like an angel. Maybe she can teach me when I have more time.

Yes, I do come from a family of talented musicians. My grandparents are wonderful singers. I love to hear them sing together. My grandmother is a member of the church choir, but sometimes I think she sees every one else as her backup. She's the only person I know that will start a song and never finish it if she can help it. She'll grab a mike, come down out of the choir stand and walk through the pews, singing to each person as if it is her personal concert and there is no sermon necessary. Yes I sing too. I joined the youth choir for a short stint when I was in high school and my grandmother wanted me to sing a duet with her during an upcoming church service. My mother and my aunts told me to say no immediately upon hearing the idea. My grandmother is a diva. They explained that if I agreed to sing with her, it would turn into a competition of riffs and never-ending runs between the two of us. It happened once with my Aunt Lisa and no one ever volunteered to sing a duet with my grandmother since then. I'm sure you know that I politely declined her invitation.

No one in my family has ever sought financial gain through music. We do it more for ourselves and to share it with others. My favorite things to play are Christmas standards, and my mother will always sing along no matter the time of year. She has a deep tenor voice that you wouldn't expect to come out of a woman standing only five feet tall. My voice? It's all over the place. I can do high notes and extremely low notes with the same amount of effort. When I was in the a capella group at Agnes Scott it made me feel like somewhat of a unicorn; some weeks I would be a Soprano, other weeks I would be an Alto or even Bass. Yes, I go to Agnes Scott. Yes, it is a great school. I'm a Creative Writing Major and History Minor. No I do not want to be a teacher. Here's the extra bread that you asked for. No you didn't get me off track at

all. Curious minds always want to know about Agnes Scott. My grandfather? He's a very soulful singer like my grandma. He's the one that got me to join the youth choir in the first place. When it was time for me to lead my first song at church I was a nervous wreck. He told me "Rabbit Foot, you gon' and sing that song at church. Imma be there, so you can just sing to me and pretend to look at everybody else." Why does he call me Rabbit Foot? Because he thinks I'm a good luck charm. All of my other female cousins are less than savory characters, to put it nicely. I did sing the song. I should probably mention that my grandfather is a deacon of our church, and that all of the deacons sit on the right side of the congregation. He told me to sing to him, so I did. As I spent the majority of the time staring towards the far right of the crowd, I wasn't nervous. Periodically he would make a circle with his finger to remind me to pretend to sing to everybody else.

You want to know how I ended up with this particular name? It's a pretty funny story, but my father still doesn't think so. My name wasn't supposed to be Karmen at all. Camille was my father's intention, as he'd hoped that I would grow up to be a distinguished woman like my almost-namesake Camille Cosby. Anyone married to one of the funniest comedians around had to possess a certain level of dignity and self-respect. Well, my mother liked the ring of Karmen better. Plus she wanted my first and middle initials to match with my sister's initials: K(for Kirsten) and Q(for Qiana, who goes by her middle name. Her first name is Arius). She also really wanted a Coke when it was time for my birth certificate to be signed. It just so happened that when daddy left to get her a Coke, they entered the room with the birth certificate. That's why Karmen stands in front of you today and not Camille. I'll definitely get you a Coke after a story like that, sir.

I don't know any specifics of what region of Africa my ancestors may have come from. None of them had the time to document anything, sorry. They were too busy being chained to each other and stacked like mere cargo, wallowing in their own filth mixed with everyone else's. I'm just as uncertain of my past as they were of their futures. The chances of our paths ever crossing are pretty much slim to none. Sorry to disappoint you. It must be nice to know of your German, Hungarian, Icelandic descent and to compare notes with your friends and family. As you sit at my table, I envy how naïve you are to the history around you. All of your culture and education blinds you to the fact that I can be like you and not like you at the same time. Because I am cultured, I couldn't have come entirely from enslaved people. Because I am cultured, I should be able to unpack every detail of my past. Would you like some Parmesan cheese with your pasta?

No, you didn't offend me at all. But I do hope you leave here today know-

ing who I am as opposed to what I am. So many times in a week, I get asked questions about my potential mixed racial identity and my country of origin. For years I've simply assumed that I was a black girl from the country. Apparently in the city people require a bit more explanation of these kinds of things.

You have a wonderful rest of the day. Come back and see us soon.

A Venezuelan woman comes into the restaurant one evening with her son and a friend of his. She traveled from Venezuela to see him graduate from culinary school in Atlanta. I was carrying on a conversation with them, as I try to do with all of the customers that sit in my section, regardless of language barriers that may be there. I genuinely enjoy people, and I'll play charades as long as I have to because I love the interaction. Her English was shaky, but understandable.

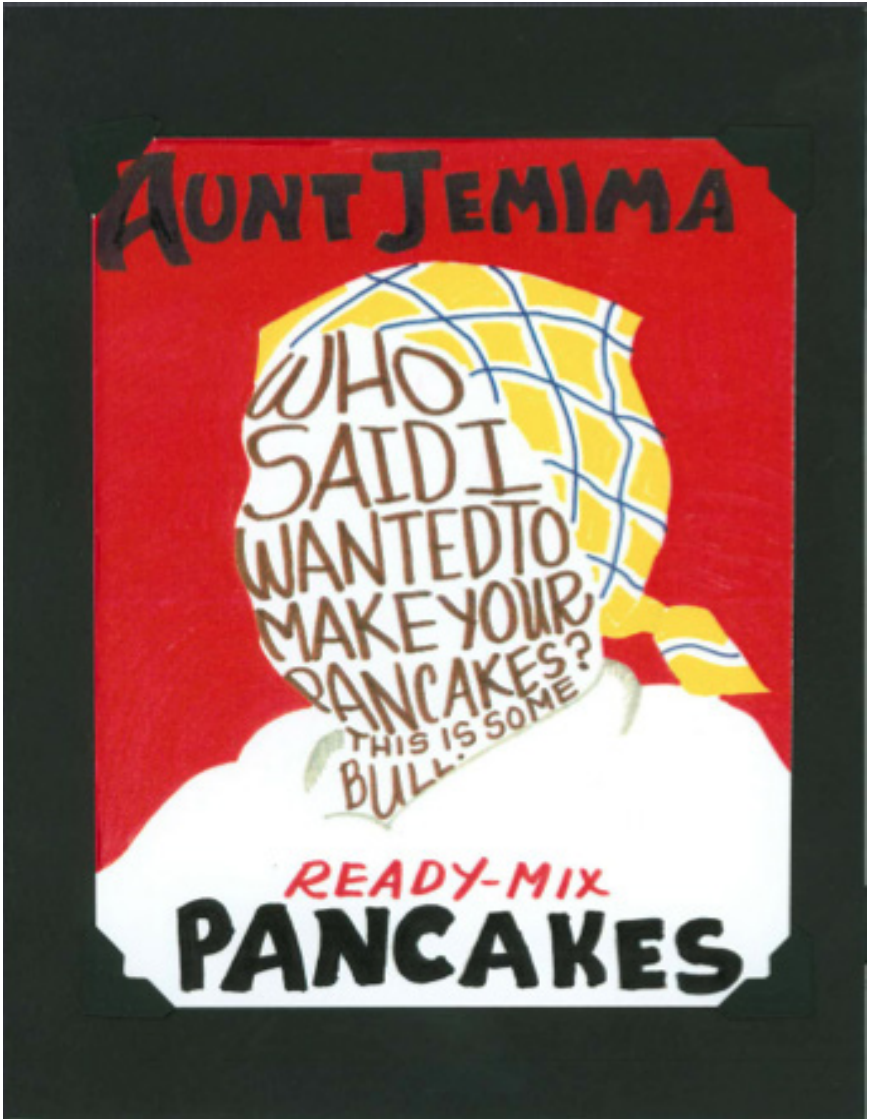
* * *

"Friend, I just want to let you know that you are beautiful young lady. Very cute. Your smile is big and fills this room. It warms me. You are kind. Take our picture?"

She pulls out her smartphone and I reach for it to take a picture of her with her son at their celebratory dinner.

"Oh no! We take one together so I can have it with me always. I will print it back home to remember you!"

She hands it to her son, who is beaming as we hug together on the bench, posing and smiling together.



Aunt Jemima

Brittney Jackson

Silence Amongst the Fur

Mariah Cawthorne

The closet is a grey color. I do not know if it is really this color because I always sneak into her closet and never turn on the light for fear that I will be caught. I enter and immediately run my fingers across the dark fur coats, although I hate fur, I feel a tingling sensation whenever I do this. Everything in the closet is in the exact place it was fifteen years ago when she died. Although this may sound eerie, it is comforting to me. The closet is my only concrete Image of my great-grandmother. I know that she is always with me, when I am in the closet it is the one place that I am very conscious of her presence. The smell of worn Chanel perfume clings to the fur, suits, hats, purses and shoes. The smell most of all, reminds me of the hugs that I wished that I had growing up.

My great-grandmother did not grow up wealthy, but dressed as if she did. Everyone in my family describes her as always wearing linen pants, skirts or even dresses and always wearing stockings and heeled shoes. In the wintertime, she wore one of her many brown or black rabbit fur coats. In the summer, she still wore stockings, but wore clothes of lighter material. These clothes remain hung on wooden hangers, organized based on the article of clothing. The pants all lie folded in one section on the left, the furs in the front right, and the dresses in the back right. As I walk in, I slide my fingers along them all, while walking to the back of the closet. I stand in the back—facing the wall—closing my eyes. I then turn around to face the slightly opened door and sit pretzel-style on the cream colored carpet. As I sit there, I hear nothing but silence. Although it is silent, I know that I am not alone. I feel her presence there. That is the only time I feel her with me.

I was only three and a half years old when she died, so my memories of her are fragmented. Outside of her closet, my memories of her are like an incomplete puzzle— I have pieces here and there, but not the full picture.

* * *

I do not know much about my great-grandmother's upbringing, but I do know that her family is originally from Mississippi and Louisiana. For many black people growing up in the south in the early 1900's was difficult racially and economically, but many old remedies were inherited. My great-grandmother had a natural remedy for every illness. One in particular was ringworm. I am not sure when she learned this or from who she learned this,

but she believed that a ritual with turpentine could cure wring worm. Turpentine is a liquid that is distilled from pine leaves, but it is said to irritate the skin and eyes, damage the lungs, respiratory system and central nervous system if inhaled. I never experienced any of this although I received the turpentine treatment many times. My dad says that when we went to visit Peoria from Des Moines, I would go over to my great-grandparents' house to play. When over there, Grandma Iris would ask me to lift my shirt. When I did this, she would take the turpentine and draw a line, with her finger, from the top of my chest to my naval. She would then trace my naval seven times, we would count together, and that was supposed to cure me from ringworm. I am not sure how accurate that is, but I have never gotten ringworm a day in my life.

* * *

Her name was Iris Geneva Campbell. I was told that her tombstone has a line down the middle because my great-grandparents bought plots of land so they could be buried next to each other. When my great-grandfather passes his information will complete the tombstone. Under her name are the dates April 26, 1918-February 14, 1997. I have only visited the gravesite once. I did not get out of the car. I put my head down, forcing myself not to look. I knew where we were, but I could not bring myself to see her. I have not seen her or talked to her for 15 years. I am too afraid to go to the grave now. I do not know what to say.

* * *

February 14, 1997. To most people that day was one filled with balloons, hearts, and cards. That night, for my family, was the night my mother found out that my great-grandmother had passed away. She died from Leukemia, a disease that she had only been diagnosed with two years before. She died at 78.

It was a Friday night. My father recalls coming home to my mother crying. At the age of four, I had no recollection of this. I did not remember that we left Des Moines, Iowa to drive to Peoria, Illinois to stay for the week leading up to the funeral. I was told that my mother, sister and myself stayed with my grandmother and that my father joined us again on Thursday for the wake. I do not remember there being a wake.

* * *

Friday February 21, 1997. I strangely remember this day. I remem-

ber walking into a very large church, that to this day I have not seen again. I walked, holding my father's hand all the way down the very long aisle. His hand was so large that only my fingertips showed on the other side. I felt safe in his hands. I knew that nothing bad would happen, since daddy was holding on to me.

I was wearing a dark green velvet dress and my sister, who would turn two the next day, was wearing a dark red dress. My parents thought it was enough for us to wear dark colors and dress appropriately versus wearing all black.

I followed my dad until we turned in front of the chestnut colored wooden pew, in the front of St. Paul's Baptist Church. We, my immediate family, were not Baptist. My great-grandmother was the only one who was Baptist. I sat at the end of the pew and looked to my left. I saw my grandmother and my mother crying, my dad put his arm around my mother while holding my one-year old sister. I was confused because I did not know why they were crying. I had never seen my grandmother or my mother cry before, and this sight terrified me. To this day, I have not seen my grandmother cry outside of that day. I have only seen my mother cry two other times, which were both deaths.

My mother described my behavior as very quiet and curious. She said, "You didn't really understand what was happening. All that you knew was that your great grandma wasn't coming back." I do not recall this conversation taking place. I just remember feeling stuck to the pew, forced to behave, and questioning why the strongest people in my world were breaking down. I believe my confusion comes from me not having many memories of my great-grandma and me.

* * *

During the funeral, my grandmother went to the altar to speak. I have no recollection of what she said. I think it was a thank you to everyone that attended. I remember her shaking on her way up to the altar. She was wearing all black, and her face looked as defeated and lost and she felt. As she attempted to form sentences, tears flowed down her cheeks and hurt her throat, making it hard for her to speak. I wanted to hug her and give her a kiss to make her feel better. Something about the chestnut pew restricted me.

* * *

One memory I have of my grandma Iris was that she bought me a dog. I was so excited to be getting a dog. At the age of three, I did not

understand that puppies can be very playful and that may be a little scary at times. I was playing with the large tan scraggily dog, when it jumped up in excitement — forcing me to curl my arms in as a way to protect myself. The dog’s paw scratched the upper left part of my lip. I then fell to the ground and started crying. My father ran to my rescue asking what had happened. I said, “The dog scratched me,” while my lipped quivered and tears continued to roll down my face. My great-grandma took the dog into the kitchen and I never saw the dog again. To this day it is a mystery as to what happened to that dog.

* * *

I am not sure if this is my own memory, or a story that has been told to me so frequently that I remember it as my own. Grandma Iris would always threaten to get her shoe when I misbehaved. This was the equivalent of a spanking, but I am unsure why it was done with a shoe. There was one time, where my three-year-old self felt very brave. She threatened me and said, “I’m gon’ get my shoe.” I then repeated, “I’m gon’ get my shoe. I’m gon’ get my shoe.” My great-aunt Joyce says that she paused before laughing at the fact that a three-year old had just mocked her. I laugh every time I hear this story and think that my cuteness had gotten me out of trouble. And in this case, it did.

* * *

I think about the role that I want my great-grandmother plays in my life, and so far I have not come up with anything. I do not think about her outside of when I am in Peoria, Illinois or on Valentine’s Day. I can only think of one thing she has said to me. I am told that she loved me so very much, but I have no recollection of this love except for in terms of material items. I know she bought me many clothes when I was a baby, and she bought me a dog, but that is not love. It frustrates me that I can feel her presence, but not her love. My only sense of her is her fur coats. I long to connect to her on a deeper level, but I let her escape my mind like an assignment I forgot to write down. I want to feel her love, to understand it. I want to connect with her.

* * *

The want for her connection come from me feeling like I owe her. I would not be Mariah, but probably a Lena or Erin if it weren’t for her. My parent’s have told me that on the day that I was born, Grandma Iris walked into the hospital room after the delivery, took one look at me and said, “That child is a Mariah. She looks like a Mariah.” Knowing her, she probably said

it in a very matter-of-fact tone, not leaving room for any arguments. She then left the hospital with my grandmother. My mother said she was confused as to where they went for hours, but when they arrived they had trunks filled to the brim with clothes for me. I have not recollection of any of this, but it was said that I had about three outfit choices for the day I departed from the hospital.

The day we left the hospital, Grandma Iris argued with my father as to whether or not I needed to be wrapped up in blankets to go home. I was born on August 22, which is typically hot in the Midwest. I imagine the conversation to go something like this,

“Now Malcolm, are you going to wrap my baby up before you put her in the car seat?”

“No ma’am, it’s august, we were going to take her in the hospital blanket.”

“Now Malcolm, if they baby gets cold she could get pneumonia, “ she said slowly.

“Well ma’am, I don’t know how she will get cold.”

“Now Malcolm, she is just a baby and cannot fight things like we can.”

At this point, my mother probably snapped my father a look telling him that he should just wrap me up because arguing with her was pointless. Indeed, I left the hospital wrapped in three blankets. Grandma Iris did not smile because she got her way, she knew she was right all a long and kept the neutral look on her face.

As my parents put me into the car seat, and drove the twenty minutes to our apartment, my dad says that he took me out of the car seat and I was sweating profusely. Once I was in the house, he took off some of the blankets.

* * *

It saddens me that I only have two memories with Grandma Iris when she was alive. I do not know anything about her childhood, what she did, or who she really was. I know that I have always felt safe in her house, and that her presence continues to be the elephant in the room. I hate that I remember so little of her alive, but I remember her dead. I want to remember her. I want her to play a more pertinent role in my life, but her death plagues me because it has never affected me, and for the most part I do not think about it. I can always see her face in my head, but even that get’s blurred out by homework, classes and meetings.

I only feel close to her when I am sitting pretzel-style in her closet. Most of the time, I sit in complete silence and try to feel her there. I sit in the

grey room, trying to build up the courage to talk to her. I have never said anything. If I could speak, I would say: “ I love you grandma. And, I am sorry it took me this long to reconnect. I wasn’t ready then, but I am ready now.”

Electric Ladies

Mia Jones-Walker



Bringing Up Curls

Jessica Mejia

Growing up, I constantly had either one of my aunts or grandmothers hovering over me with a round bristle brush in one hand and a high heat blow dryer in the other, pulling vigorously from the root of my head, down towards the tip of my curly strands of hair. This method of blow-drying is known in Washington Heights, New York and other Hispanic-dominated neighborhoods as the Dominican blow-out, famous for creating the same straightened texture as a flat iron would. These blow-out sessions started when I was four and a half years old and usually occurred at either my grandmother Emerita's apartment, my aunt Yanira's apartment, or my aunt Magaly's apartment. I'd always admired them and thought of them as strong women, not because of their brave tenacity to walk the streets of New York alone at dark, but because of the strong, tight grip they had over the brush as they tugged down at my curls. After these sessions, my scalp would look as red as a ripe apple, waiting to be peeled.

In my culture, curly hair is seen as something that needs to be confined, dominated, and any other synonym that describes being oppressed until the point of being unable to be itself. Luckily, my mother has always had a loose grip on brushes and chose to mostly pin my hair into multi-colored rollers, putting me under a dryer for an hour or more. This was the only alternative she had in dealing with my locks after my father joined the army and we moved to Seattle, away from my aunts and grandmothers. Like many other "curlies", the humid, rainy weather of Seattle electrified my hair from its tips to its roots, each strand shooting out from my scalp as uncontrollable frizz. The rollers smoothed my hair, made it manageable, but even then, a few drops of rain would re-activate my curls around the nape of my neck, forming spring roll-shaped hair. In minutes, these large compacted loops would pop out around my whole head until I looked like an unkempt, brown-headed version of Shirley Temple.

When we moved to Germany, we met a Dominican hair stylist named Natalie that gave me the same excruciating blow-outs that my aunts and grandmothers did. I joke with my mom that I must have had a hard head when I was young, because I cry when my hair is brushed with half the force now than when my family members blow-dried it. She agrees, but for different reasons. In my first session, Natalie was a little dismayed when she saw me cringe and tilt my head to the side, trying to escape the harsh tug of the brush. My mother, watching, responded by laughing that it had been years

since I received a Dominican blow-out. All the sessions I endured as a child proved not only harmful for my hair (it became weak and brittle), but also made my scalp overly sensitive, so much so that my eyes watered.

Normally, my mother would roll my hair once a week (the dryness and delicacy of my curls prevented me from washing my hair every day, otherwise my hair would have been blow-dried every day). I was only exempted from this schedule when I had swimming lessons or when my hair was so greasy and limp that I had to wash it before the next set.

When entering middle school and throughout high school, I began straightening my hair every day before I went to school and had three different ceramic straighteners at my disposal. I learned that guys liked the sleek look of straight hair, because they wanted to run their hands through the hair. And boy did I want a guy to do that to me. The perfect, ideal woman portrayed by the media was one with long, straight, composed hair, and my ringlets shouted rebellion. Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* gave tips on how to control unruly hair by showing before and after pictures of girls with wavy/curly hair looking sad and the aftermath when they are transformed to happy, straight hair vixens. I was further led to believe that my hair needed to be “fixed” during my junior year of high school when a girl in my gym class began scrutinizing my locks by calling me nappy-head. I never knew how low people could take bullying until that happened to me. The shame I suffered affected me so much that by the time high school finished, I no longer had spirals, but protruding sticks of hair that felt as stiff as hay.

After one of her many trips to the Dominican Republic, my grandmother Emerita sent me jars of deep conditioner that had a special blend of mayonnaise, eggs, and other ingredients designed to revitalize curly hair. In addition to this, my mother introduced me to VO5’s hot oil treatment that you put in your hair while in the shower. This all helped to a certain degree (a few of my curls came back), but I could no longer feel the soft, bouncy curls I had when I was young. The extent of the damage was to the point of no remedy, leaving me with no other choice: to cut it.

To me, graduating from high school symbolized the shedding of my old identity and the birth of a new me who had once ashamedly rejected something my aunt and grandmothers were trying to dismiss themselves: their curly hair. Being a mix of different races, I realized that I could not change the biological components of myself. A few days after I walked across the stage to receive my diploma, I dismissed my mother’s concern and everyone else who told me not to do it as I exited the door of the salon with my new pixie cut.

I decided to cut my hair as short as possible to regrow my hair to its

natural state. The idea was promising, but reality reared its ugly head in the door when the way I envisioned my haircut looking, wasn't what I saw in the mirror.

Instead of a sleek, Audrey Hepburn look, I came out looking like Justin Timberlake during his 'N Sync days. True, the reason I went through with it was to regrow my curly hair, but you can't blame a girl for wanting to look cute in the process. After the "I told you your hair wouldn't look good in this cut!" from my mother, I panicked and went to a salon to receive the Keratin treatment, which temporarily straightens hair. I felt like such a failure, knowing I digressed from my original intention and relaxed my hair because I felt ashamed of the way the ringlets formed a crown above my head. People mistook me for a young boy WAY too many times.

Slowly, but steadily, the treatment warred off and the strands of my hair began taking an S shape. Never did I think my hair could look as beautiful as it did when I saw it during its regrowth. No longer did it recoil in fear of heat being imposed on it. Nor was it oppressed, flattened against my head; it would inflate and rise upward in all its glory like a halo, framing my face.

I look at myself in the mirror and I now see myself. My curls are free in the way I aim to be a free soul. It's been years since I've had a Dominican blow-out and years since my mother has tried to convince me to get one. Through the process of straightening my hair, the women in my family made me realize how beautiful my curls are and they should be treated with care, otherwise I will lose them. Unlike my former self, I encourage volumized hair and wear it loose in all its glory almost all 365 days in the year. I now use products geared towards curly hair such as Ouidad, Jessicurl, and As I Am, and am the proud owner of a red shirt that exclaims in white text, "Iron clothes, not curls." One of my friends recently told me that I'm the only curly hair activist they know, and I'm sure damn proud of it!

A Note From The Editor

It is a pleasure to be the editor of such a motivational publication. I want to give a special thanks to Ms. Barbara Washington for her enlightening introduction and Julian Plowden for his outstanding cover art. Of course Nandi could never be a success without the array of art from Agnes Scott submitters. I am always amazed at the diverse talent and beauty that speaks from each page. In a world that works against women of color, I hope that Nandi continues to exist as a space to express the diverse journey of being who we are.

Courtney F. Taylor

