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breaklove

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*breaklove* is about the lack of love we have for others and ourselves. The poems therein examine the lack of courage and honesty it takes for us to continually express love in its truest forms. Some love objects and ideals, some restrict whom to love, some are afraid to love, while others simply forget to love those that are closest to them. *breaklove* is for those of us who have lost sight of everything. *breaklove* is a reminder for those who have not.

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\* The poems "Intimacy" and "Gone" have been previously published. See footnotes in the manuscript for details.

## The Mating Dance of Blackbirds

*His*

Mm, mm, mm.  
you deprive me of my brain  
before you even ask my name.  
While I speak, you measure  
how wide can you spread my  
womb.- Touch me, suckle my breasts  
like a bee suckles nectar from a flower  
I hadn't given permission to bloom.  
When I decline you say "friends, then"  
but in your eyes I see your desire,  
desperation tempered by Mama's good training.  
And so I say no because I'm not easy.  
But my, oh, my...aren't you fine?

*Hers*

Wait a minute, Honey! You play hard to get,  
as if with that X chromosome You were gifted  
with a manual of "how to say no" and given  
a right to. Say my name then push me away.  
You grant me the power to make you cry  
before You even get to know my name.  
But that was him-not me. Yes, I want You and I  
appreciate everything that is You,  
even if You don't want me to  
my future needs you. Yes in Your eyes  
but You lick your lips and say no. Fine,  
decline if You want. But  
tell me Your name.

**Intimacy**<sup>1</sup>

it's his  
heartbeat  
against hers,  
that envelops  
silence whole,  
that resounds  
in their souls  
and seduces

reticence.  
it's her  
ear press'd  
against his  
chest  
against hers,  
mating,  
with nothing  
in between.

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<sup>1</sup> Previously published in *The Ampersand*, Vol. V: issue ii, Spring 2007

**The First Night in America I Slept with a Woman Not My Wife**

The mole beneath her breast felt like a tortilla,  
the ones packed in plastic that the gringos buy.  
And it made me think of mi abuela  
grinding maize for the tortillas we'd have for supper  
each evening. Los niños would play in the dirt  
barefoot. Mi esposa would take down the laundry  
dry from the sun. And now I can even smell the sun,  
see it peeking behind some clouds as I drive home  
into the woman, not my wife, beneath me.  
Her hands soft, not work roughened,  
like mi esposa, caress then grip my back.  
I lick a bead of sweat off the dark brown skin of her neck.  
She tasted like the salt I licked off my hand the first time  
I had tequila in a bar back home when I was fifteen.  
I liked her taste, her smell, the feel of her walls against me  
when I cried out after she did. I rolled over, panting,  
and she looked at me in wonder  
with brown eyes the shade of which I'd never seen before.  
I ran a hand through her kinky hair and wished  
it was the hair of my wife my fingers ran through.  
But I settle for her because she was vibrant;  
she smelled like home. She tasted like my memories  
and she gave back to me like mi abuela.  
This black woman was sweet;  
she crafted ties to a land I'd left that my wife could not.  
This woman renews memories I'd forgot. So I love her  
I love her, I *love* her so that she brings me home.  
And when she falls asleep, I leave the bed, hers, the house, hers,  
to sleep in an apartment that I share with 9 other men  
and wonder, before falling asleep, when I can taste home again.

### **This Here Man**

He speaks to my sensuality,  
to the dreams conjured out of darkness  
and from them craft daylight fantasies  
that make my loins quiver  
make my back arch and wish  
his arms were around me instead of the ones i got.  
it's his nightwhispers that haunts my reality.  
He got me twisted;  
got my sanity, my peace, and left me with nothing  
but the memory of the way his cheeks dimple  
when he smiles. He stirs me with a sense of wonderment and  
am i gonna see him again?  
will i know the scent of his and mine mingled?  
Will he conjure my pleasure and my pain?  
Will i let him?

## **An Unspoken Taboo**

If she could taste crème, she would  
dip her spoon in and savor the taste  
with her tongue, tentative to let go.-  
Sashay a finger into vanilla and  
suckle the remnants until she can taste her bone.  
Strawberried dream, honeyed dew, marzipan  
etched into his smile,  
with her savoring him.

**forgive me**

*cariño, cariño, perdóneme, por favor, por favor...*

i could not sleep for the want of telling you this:  
with callous words, i bruised the tenderest of affections  
and still i am filled with the want of you;  
desire strong, needing our kisses, which have yet to exist  
and it is because of this i feel the pain of my err to you.

*cómo yo le adoro pero*

how foolish I acted the day before.  
and how much the guilt and shame consumes me.  
if i could tell you sweet words of apologies and *amor*,  
then perhaps your green eyes would not haunt me so  
with visions of them filled with anger and disbelief.  
already, they chased my slumber into the wee hours of the morn.

if you will permit  
may i come to you and tell you how much of a fool i have been?  
may i tell you my apologies with quaint kisses  
and with whispered solemn words? may i beg your forgiveness?

*cariño, cariño, perdóneme, por favor, por favor...*

## **When a White Woman Loves a Black Man**

I wish I could kiss away  
every indignity my ancestors gave yours.  
But all I can do is hide my tears  
while I kiss every inch of your back.-  
Gaze in your eyes when we love,  
when you're inside of me. I'd make it so  
history is crippled and in its place  
a haven of love, respect, and dignity is born.  
But since I cannot.  
I will not.

Instead,  
I make with love you  
even with our past stenching behind us,  
until my youth is given to our children  
and I know the name of each shade of brown in your eyes.  
So go on and lament the past but  
without it, I'd have never met you,  
made our present, wish kiss our future love to God  
and hope it never dies.  
And so I won't waste time with apologies  
but on making memories.

And that shall have to be enough.

**If Eve Could Speak**

The first kiss was  
like  
a section of a blood orange-  
or perhaps a tangelo-  
bursting on my tongue, liquid  
smooth and sweet, like a lullaby.

**Keats undisclosed love letter to Fanny**

(Before they exist as theoretical nonsense)

I would guarantee each second spent.

I would count every grain of sand,

watch the reflection of our future life in your eyes,

sing unmetered lullabies. Because time won't matter when  
time is the only infinity that is

so intangible that the days and nights start over and over;

and each calendar month we live now is a short minute

(and a year is just compounded memories that are  
only a fraction of what was), enough grains of sand to fill  
a minute vial but not enough for me.

So should I be content with what we have?- Or

do I long for days unfettered by my imperfections.

Must I watch these imperfections overtake and cripple us by and by?

Must I be content with only these few grains of sand?

**a moment unnamed but defined**

He sits on his bed, writing, when

a thought of *her* spills into his mind  
like drops of dye in a glass of water,  
unfurling liquid swirls of smoke  
permeating his thoughts, his words,  
until everything blends into this moment of truth stretched so thin that time defies itself.  
She still pushes adrenaline through his veins  
until it sweats out the pores of his skin.  
His ink pen paused, but his thoughts roll on and on.  
His heart pulls at his chest;  
his lungs fight for air they already have.  
And he can see a picture of her still fresh in his mind  
smiling at him the way she did before he left. And

the moment passes;  
then he learns to breathe again.

## **The Earth's Canticle to the Sea**

Like the birth of a cloud, thoughts of you come.

Droplet then you trickled,

brooked, streamed, rivered, and gulfed in, out, upon, around, under and through everything that defines who I am and pretend to be, who I was and am not, until I became inundated with the vastness of a thousand seas. You refracted me with such clarity that I discovered new parts of me, and you, and us, and we eroded my doubts, refined my hopes, seeped into my heart, laved my spirit anew, became my building block of life because I was dehydrated. But

I did not ask to be filled by you or become lost in this osmotic process called loving you. Yet...it is infallible for the sea not to find land. No matter how much I quake or shift or tremble you still run into my soul, make me alluvial by a pluvial you. Thus I become your sharon, your littoral. But must you swamp my mountains, bayou my forests, torrent my deserts, mist my valleys, and mere my plains? Must I become your ocean's floor, a lost abyss and then watch you evaporate as if you didn't exist?

**Gone<sup>2</sup>**

Your kisses fade  
like autumn leaves  
and, harsh and unforgiving,  
leaves me bare,  
but paints the wind.  
You gradually left  
one kiss  
not given  
at a time.  
Until one moment,  
I notice that we are gone  
  
and solitude strips me to the bone.

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<sup>2</sup> Previously published in *The Ampersand*: Interactive DVD from Vol. V: issue ii, Spring 2007

**Jenni Lee Masters the Art of Being an Imperfect Woman**

*“I shall greatly increase [your] pain, ...your craving will be for your [man], and he will dominate you.”  
–Genesis 3:16*

Perfection  
ain't my thing. And your charm  
is just a trinket that my smile frowns upon,  
which seems to make you mad. But  
I had your back when your mama threw you out  
after swigging a keg of beer. My tongue is sharp,  
and I can be wild as a lioness in heat. But  
it was me who gripped your hand  
when my Poppa threatened to kill us when we ran off.  
I am fifteen, seventeen, and twenty,  
penniless but the stars are mine to give you.  
And I'll be here even when you take a breather,  
when you fling shards of broken gin bottles at my heart,  
when you want to knock me around the room.  
I would never leave you

### **Chorus of the Libertines**

We love like demons and madmen.  
We are the reason Mr. Boots the family cat  
didn't come home last night, the reason  
Mrs. Jung's husband was found torn to pieces  
and scattered all over Forest Park. We suckle dogs to our teats.  
We beat our husbands.  
And we don't do dishes!-  
Who would dare refuse out sex?  
We damn them and then howl at the moon  
at odd hours of the month. We prey the city  
for wine and blood. We revel  
in it. We dance  
naked. We flood the streets. We  
trample your precious tulip and rose beds and  
blame it on the doldrums of suburbia.  
Watch out, man!  
We come for you...

**From the Mouth of the Lost Mothers of Sierra Leone**

Atrocities are what my sons give me.  
Their too fervent love tears the flesh from my bones;  
my daughters are raped out of my arms  
and my brothers supplant them with nightmares.  
I harvest tears instead of food. They harvest bullet wounds.  
And still I long to scratch at the dying earth  
for fistfuls of grain till the sun is dead again,  
feeding my children love but  
watching their stomachs grow pregnant with hunger.  
Now we eat rations in a small, warm room,  
waiting for our entry to America  
but forced to endure beasts rutting in the night.

### **Why Greta Jones Can't Wear an Earring in Her Left Ear**

With her arm wrapped around her lover's waist, she lazed on the edge of exhaustion as his warm breath blew gently in her ear. He whispered words of escape to Mexico, his hand drawing lazy circles on the small of her back.

She let him stay since Scott didn't get home 'til ten and the drive from his job at the factory would take half an hour. She soaked up the warmth of his body like a heliconia in the sun and nestled closer to meld her body into his.

When she heard the heavy footsteps of Scott's boots on the stairs, she quickly hid her lover and got back on the bed. But Scott smelled the scent of conjoined bodies. He saw her naked and glistening. And he knew.

So he crossed the room and slapped her across her face. And a bloodied diamond earring fell to the floor.

**To my son who defended my honor** (*note from a slave to her freed son, circa 1788*)

Because I loved your father,  
you are half of what I am.  
Not a niger,  
not a bitch,  
nor some beast God dared to create. Instead,  
I am:

half prophecy and half queen,  
filled with sweetness of ripened blackberries.  
I am grace and poise and  
magnanimity. Like the proverbs and psalms of kings,  
I stand composed,  
filled with secret passions, phenomena, and mysteries.  
And only in the thick of dreams  
can they grasp what I purpose to be.

So my son,  
tread softly  
but  
wear your bruises and cuts proudly.  
These are only temporary marks.  
And these mark the pride  
and honor and dignity  
of yours and mine,  
of yours and mine,  
of yours and mine.

## Le rêve du Bel Homme

Wednesday, I stopped in a café  
to buy a cream filled croissant  
drizzled with dark chocolate.  
And I caught a glimpse of the baker, smiled,  
waved good-bye and went on my way.

That night I dreamt of a man,  
portly in size,  
belly bared, dimpled only by his navel,  
round, perfection in diameter and size  
like the moon, pale and full,  
soft like the touch of that moon's light  
on the wings of a moth in flight,  
and it slowly rising then falling with life and breath.  
He was asleep, in his own dreams,  
bare of sheets or clothes on a bed of clouds,  
with wind lathing gently over his body.  
I looked upon his face, perfection,  
I had never seen a face so beautiful  
and I climbed in beside him,  
careful not to disturb his rest,  
lay my head on shoulder,  
listened to the rhythm of his heartbeat  
as if it could make me closer to him.  
I curled my body around his belly  
like a black corona wound round the moon,  
my dark skin against the pale of his.  
He took a deep breath, a sound of contentment,  
and his hand rested on the curvature of my neck,  
stroked me gently, as if to waylay all my fears.  
And I purred. Ah, perfection! bliss,  
with my body wrapped around his.

### **Memories of the Dead Are Like the Seeds of a Dandelion**

At 7, he knew it was a serious occasion. But he didn't know the man lying in the pine box. His father hadn't come home once since he went off to war 3 years back. All he could remember were faint details of his face, his hands. And through tears of frustration, he watched his sister standing beside him, pluck a dandelion, pucker her lips and "*Don't do that, Prudence!*" blow. She didn't know those seeds were his memories flurrying in a cloud, right in front of his face and then blown away by the wind.

And he watched them vanish into the clouds.

### Thoughts of a Black Woman While Shopping at Soulard\*

This ain't a quaint poem about the lovely trip I had one hot day in August, shopping at Soulard, nibbling on hot funnel cakes and sipping fresh squeezed lemonade, strolling past a man playing the violin that wished pennies, dimes, and dollars were like the many beads of sweat rolling down his face.- Hearing some man's kids complain about the smells and "why can't we go to Schnucks' where it's cool and there are no flies?" It's not about haggling with some farmer over strawberries, which are sweet but for 3 bucks a pound is too much, that'll mold over by the next day in your fridge.- Seeing pole beans for the first time and asking one black woman, and one white, how to cook them, then taking the black woman's advice. No, this is a poem 'bout what I thought while frowning at some limp greens:

How can we put a price on something so... priceless as food or that violin man's music, something that everybody needs?- Something so valuable that it becomes invaluable. Like trading your time for money, sex, life, love. Amenities that are nothing without us to make it so.

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\* Soulard is a open-air farmer's market in historic south city Saint Louis that has been in operation since the 1790's

**N. Andreil Martin** lives in Saint Louis, her hometown, close to her family, her mother and two younger sisters. She is finishing up a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing from Webster University. Ms. Martin has been previously published in *The Ampersand* and *Green Fuse*. She writes poetry, novels, long short stories, one-acts and is often afflicted with the disease of procrastination.