

***Reclining Nude*, c. 1977, Romare Bearden**

You want to say she is peach-ripe, fragrant  
Dark fruit sweetening around a hard, grooved seed,  
The tan parchment beneath her Florida sand  
As all things bring you back there—: to land  
Your mother's love threatened out of you—: you out of it.  
You: a beached thing just made, and open for the sun;  
You: a black man's creation—: his simplest collage—: a woman.

There comes a blue that smells like ocean and wet earth, blue  
That splits the face's mask and seeps into the eyes.  
An evening blue that ghosts you: outlines the hinted constellation  
Of yourself: a blue that beads from your pores as you scour  
A drenched page searching for form, a man  
With sight enough to hang you in the sky.  
Hung up, against a wall, in the right light you are

A museum piece: —this wanton: sure as one patch of sea-  
Green, a triangle, filtering light between  
The curve of your back and the crook of your elbow:  
The other, just above your shoulder, the contrast  
Of color: —this brown almost defines you: the skin—  
You are saved by—layered—paper. Look, the left hand,  
Its long, thin fingers, brazen, freeing itself from the body.

## The Buffet Dream

In the buffet dream this is what I want—:

Everything I can swallow:

What is hot—: What is cooked—: What is sweet—:

What will fit on my plate—: What will drive me—from sleep  
with longing—: This is hunger:—

before the first bite crosses my tongue, waking.

The colors of dream are there at seventeen, each day waking  
to promise of silk and open sky—: the gift of truancy: who doesn't want  
flutter and slap of wind and parachute, foreign men, falling from Icarus'

heights? A girl's hunger

for their sweat and the vowels they swallow:

Their neon canopies, their endless drifting, the pull of sleep:—

I could taste everything: the whole of this world: the idea—sweet

as leaving home, as being where I am not *supposed* to be, sweet

as desserts in the dream—: silver bowls of fresh berries and zabaglione:— as  
waking,

just once, to bright lemon tarts with single sprigs of mint someplace where sleep  
has wrought miracles. Seventeen—: coarse salt of want

on my tongue, I set out for the territories, hope to swallow

all, at least—: every drop zone I can find—: a black girl on the river Hunger:

—as free as that. I cannot leave this river—: Hunger

snakes along its slumbry route, slow as sweet

syrup, seeks low ground, overflows, swallows

a field, seeps into its green and makes it swampy, waking

the sticky, spongy air, summer's silty edge, wanton,

dripping:—a humid decade's night sweat, a constant of sleep,

until I am in Africa. In Cameroon, *une volontaire*, sleep-

deprived, listening to the dogs scratch hunger

out on Bafoussam's abundant trash piles, I want

the nineteen-year-old boy I snatched like a muddy reed from some sweet  
yielding bank, four years back, dreaming satiety, waking,  
twenty-eight, purple-mouthed from boxed wine and desire. Swallow

the St. Johns, the Susquehanna, swallow the Maury, the Lom and Djerem,  
swallow

the Atlantic you crossed chasing bright-dyed dandelion seeds to find sleep  
a glass display case of napoleons and air-pies, an éclair filled with waking.  
Empty-handed on its ever-rocking water bed, hunger  
waits you out, weights you. It's possible you've tasted every sweet  
nothing your mind can offer, that delicious list you wanted

licked down to nothing, swallowed. Freedom—: the fancy-cakes hunger  
designed, decked out in fondant ribbons. Sleep: a night's mouth filled with  
something sweet:—  
what each morning, waking, you know you will still want.

## Lost

The river, unrolled bolt of silk, gives evening the smell of fish, wet leaves, loosening matter. We glide through its blue-plum tint toward night, the leftover tang of red wine in our mouths. Upstream an idea waits for us: if we were lost how much more would we love each other. We four move toward this losing with the steady creak and drip of our rowing. We cannot in lowering darkness tell direction, whether the frog's croak came from behind or before us. Our bellies full, the swamp beckons us behind its green drapery. Whatever hides in the tangle—the surprise of cypress knees; the fierce, sharp-edged palms wetting our forearms as we walk blind through mottled night's sulfur rot and sucking mud; what flies into our mouths, impossible to see; mosquitoes lighting in our ears, their constant whine high-pitched and crazy-making; the silent patience of gators and our wary estimation of their hunger—we will keep, we are certain, as we lose ourselves for hours, when we find ourselves again bank-side, and two must choose to swim because we're not where we began. The river moves despite our stillness, our breath breathing itself into the wet heat, whether they disappear for good, the two who splash away, their heavy kicking swallowed by this evening. I am of the two who wait, waist high in water, eyes stretched wide to see

nothing but night, washing itself, black  
over black in muggy layers inches from  
my face, not my hands, skin of water, curve  
of meniscus, my breasts where I displace it,  
my undissolved legs immersed, merged  
with water, losing above, in, out of, but for  
these hands sliding over me, another's  
hands to keep me from becoming  
current tongue, lisp of leaf tips touching  
water, but for we, two, touching, agreeing  
this is my body. Agreeing, I still belong in it.