

The
TORCH



CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Editorial Statement

Message From the Advisor

"Masque & Sashie" by Mya E. M. Lacey

Image by Marcus Young

"You Win Some, You Lose Some" by Anitha Dennis

"Untitled" by Kevin Mack

Image by Howard Fontaine

"Balance" by Judith Thomas

Image by Kristal Piner

"Acta" by Melody C. Johnson

"Solace" by James Wells

"Within" by Winston Stokes



We are eternal feminine spirits...
resurrecting from the wombs
of the Earth...to spread our
message...to silence violence...
and...immerse the world in peace.

The
TORCH
Spring 2012

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We also thank all those who submitted
their work for consideration.
To lift one's voice is an act of bravery.

MESSAGE FROM THE ADVISOR

From my vantage point, this is a parcel
that has come to you to mark a transition.
Five young women who are

about to graduate from Bowie State University offer
you evidence of their efforts to be consistent and
true to the story of their lives and dreams.

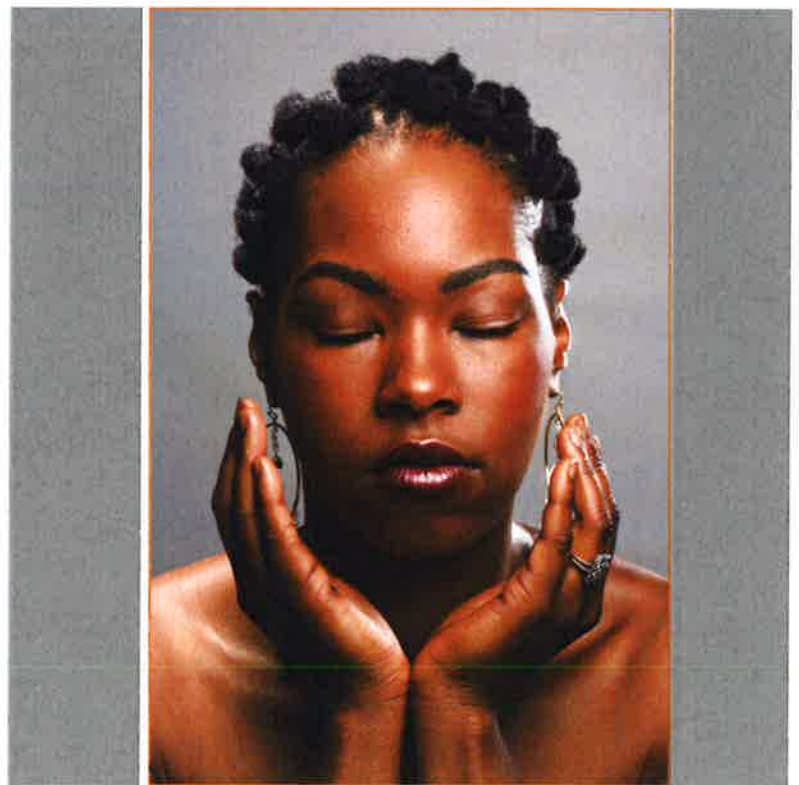
From where I write this is a small bird that rests in
your cupped hands. It is a sign of ecstasy. It is their
prayer to help other women live as free beings.

In the months ahead this project will unfold. I will
hold you responsible and occasionally I will
hold you responsible and occasionally I will

Watch for The Torch online. Until then hold this
sparrow of words and images and listen to her song.

Monifa A. Love

Monifa A. Love



MIDNIGHT & SUMMER

By *Maya E. McKeelan*

Partly Cloudy
Phantom ions
Of the tortured two.
A carbon you
You dangle through & through
Hiked
Well paid
Gripping portraits
With chocolate tearrops
And drawn
In the torrential rains
Of our past pains.
Exposed bosoms
Peeking high pitched
Hicups.
Sonnets of summer
Of mass
Solemn odes devoid
Of a higher power
Emulating all the "diens"
& "whens" that carried the calves
Contraband leading to now.
We always knew.
Psychotic in which
I seek for a platform
To build temples
Upon.

Glorious reduction
You reduce me.
Child again...
Tom fatherless children
Wooden hayer bastard
Seeking for a Master
And chaotic
Are you kidding me?
The Desert Sun
Rainily parched
And
Drenched all in one
High rises
On beaches
Lacking seamen...
Shipless and shoreless
Existence in Imbolc
Romeo and Juliet,
Wed'd in a midsummer
Eternal slumber
And wake in the storm that
Is our regard for one another.
Sight...
Trailing back to the canvas
Upon which we began
In liars me...
Elegant dust is you
You, carbon through and through
Yemanjá & Yung.

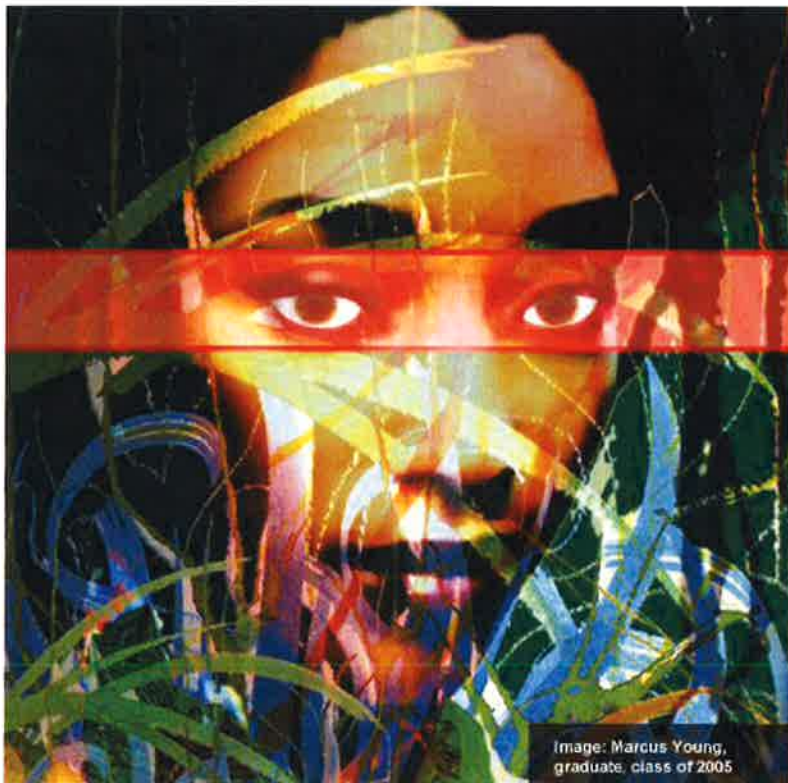


Image: Marcus Young,
graduate, class of 2005

YOU LOSE SOME, YOU WIN SOME

by Anthea Dennis

There I was: tears rolling down the side of my face and into my ears as I lay on my back bundled up in a floral blanket in the queen-sized bed. My mind was racing as I stared at the ceiling fan. My head was spinning just as the fan was. I looked over at the clock; it was 9:37 in the morning. The nerve of that man. Why would my uncle call me so early in the morning to yell at me, knowing that my disabled sister had passed away the day before.

I lay there thinking of all that my uncle had said. “You’re irresponsible and immature. You can’t use your sister’s death as an excuse, just as you can’t use your parents’ deaths as an excuse!” I could still hear his voice booming through the phone. How could he assume that I used my parents’ deaths? What had I done that was cause for his disappointment? The thoughts consumed me. I started hyperventilating because I was overwhelmed with mixed emotions. I had grief within my heart, sadness in my eyes, and anger in my blood.

My parents died when I was just a little girl. My father passed when I was eight years old, and my mother, when I was eleven. I stayed with my older sister from the time that my parents died. We shared the same father, but she had a different mother. We are eleven years apart. She became my legal guardian when she was 19. Living with my sister was not a walk in the park. She abused me verbally and would make me feel like an unwanted creature in her home--a burden she couldn't get rid of. I had justified her actions by reminding myself that she was bitter because she had sacrificed her youth to take care of me, our brother, A.J., and our mentally disabled sister, Maia.

The four of us stayed in a house on the Eastside that my older sister had bought with the money that our father had left us. One-by-one we all eventually were kicked out of that home. A.J. was taken away by DCF when they

speculated that he was being abused. I kept my mouth shut when they questioned me, so they left me there thinking I was okay. Maia found herself a lover and ran away with him. She would come back off and on, only to get kicked out before she had the chance to run off. In 2006, she left and never came back. I didn't know that would be the last time we saw each other face to face.

My friends called me, "The Last One Standing." Despite our ups and downs, my sister managed to keep me around. Then one day, my older sister received the cell phone bill and saw that a 911 call had been placed from my phone. I had no recollection of ever making that call and had no clue how that number showed up on the bill, but she insisted that I was trying to call the cops on her, and she kicked me out. It was Thursday, August 14, 2008. That was the day I realized that all I had

was myself. That's the day that I realized that I had no family.

From that day on, I moved from house to house. I never really felt like I had a place to call home. Everywhere I went, I felt like I was nothing. When I was eighteen years old and had just finished my first year in college, my aunt Val and Uncle Sterlen let me move in with them. They were like the parents I almost never had. They had a beautiful home and were such beautiful people. That beauty soon perished. Not long after I moved in, I found myself living with two crazy people who thought they needed to raise me. I didn't need to be raised; I just needed guidance. They couldn't distinguish between the two. They dictated who I could hang with, lectured me everyday, and gave me a curfew of nine.

I was very focused during my second year in college. I worked hard in school, had fun

with my friends, and checked-in frequently at home. Everything was in order. Maia would call me often, just about everyday. We would laugh, talk about the weather, and simple things. I was so happy for her. Although she had a mental disability, she took care of herself. And Mike, her lover, was taking good care of her, too. She called when he finally proposed. "Girrrr!" she said ecstatically as she extended her R's. She was living a fairy tale.

I was sitting on my bed watching television in my dorm room talking to my friend about the random things that crossed our minds. My phone rang, and it was my older sister. We weren't on the best of terms; but we had reconciled things between us. She had wished me a happy birthday the day before, so what could she want? I answered the phone and immediately knew that something was wrong by her tone of voice. She asked if I were

out of class. She took a deep breath as I did.

"Mala is the happiest," she started to tell me. "Her heart stopped!" At that moment, my heart stopped. I felt like I was in a bad dream, waiting for someone to come and pour a bucket of cold water on me to wake me up. "There was no water and it was no dream. I tried to process all that my elder sister was telling me, hanging on to every word she said. She told me that Mala was on life support, fighting for her life. I began to cry softly as I remembered that Mala had called a week earlier and I had missed the call. Feelings of guilt began to consume me. I was no longer listening to my elder sister. I tuned her out as I began to think of how I had ignored Mala's call and how I only wished that I could talk to her at that very moment. I hung up.

Moments later my elder sister called again. I dreaded answering the phone.

I excused myself from the room and went to the lounge area. I began to pace as I answered the phone.

"Hello."

"Then," she was able to make out through her sobs, "She died!" I couldn't allow her to finish. I threw my phone and started punching the cable, screaming "No, no, no!" like I was a toddler throwing a tantrum. I collapsed to the floor. I could not breathe. I sat on the floor rocking and crying, screaming in pain of a broken heart.

"I don't want to be here anymore."

I yelled, kicking and screaming, "I can't! I just can't do this!"

My boyfriend sat next to me at the front door of my residence hall when I told him the news. I needed some fresh air. We took a walk around campus as I talked about the memories I had of Mala. Then we took a seat on a cement

bench on the side of one of the buildings. I sat on his lap and he held me as I began to cry in his safe embrace. I really had answered her call. I couldn't help but feel guilty. I felt like I was not there for her.

"It's okay, baby," he whispered in my ear. He continued to tell me that everything was going to be all right to comfort me. He told me that Mala knew how much I loved her. At the end of the day I just wanted to tell her that. It saddened me to know that the next time I would see her she would be resting with her family crossed in a casket.

I was on the train to Connecticut first thing the next morning. I cried the majority of the four-hour ride. I thought of my sister the entire time. I looked out the window at the trees passing by and she just wondered why things were happening so fast. I tried to take a little nap. When the train was in New

Jersey my uncle woke me up when he called to check on me.

"Mala said you call me when you get into town!"

"Okay!" My heart began to race thinking about how close I was to my sister, yet so far away.

Once I was in town, I called my elder brother Vincent so that he could come and get me from the train station. He pulled up in his pearl white truck. I climbed in and we headed towards the American Lions Gentlemen's Club, where my family was gathered. I greeted and hugged family members. Everyone was trying to console me another. Little cousins, older cousins, nephews and uncles flooded the clubhouse. I lost track of time, then I realized I had forgotten to call my uncle. I knew he was going to be upset. He called me first before I got a chance to call him. He gave me another

one of his lectures about being responsible. I apologized, and we hung up.

When I finally went back home to my aunt and uncle's house, I could tell my uncle was still angry when I walked through the door and greeted him. I talked to my aunt and explained that Maia had no insurance and that we, the siblings, were going to have to pay for her funeral entirely out of pocket. I got myself ready for bed and cried myself to sleep another night.

My phone rang loudly near my pillow. I looked at the clock on the nightstand by my bed; it was a quarter to eight in the morning. I checked the caller ID and it read: UNCLE STERLEN. I ignored the call because I was not in the mood. I was too exhausted from crying and could barely open my swollen and puffy eyes. He called several more times. I ignored all of them until I was ready to answer. It was

during the nine o'clock hour when I decided to finally answer.

"Why didn't you call home like I asked you to?" he bellowed.

"Uncle Sterlen," I started. "My mind was not in the right place. I wasn't thinking. I just wanted to go to where my family was." I expected my uncle to understand since he of all people should know what it was like to lose a sister. He didn't feel what I felt. We hung up. It wasn't long until he was calling my phone again.

"That's a sorry excuse!" he told me. "You should go stay with them."

"If you don't want me here, Uncle Sterlen, I will go!" I yelled.

"Then go!" he replied. I felt punched in the chest by his words. I knew he didn't want me there. He was ready to let me go. I hopped out of bed and began to pack the things that I had left behind when I went to school. It

wasn't much because I had brought most of my belongings to school with me. I called my best friend from high school to see if I could stay at her house until I went back to school.

The next six days were full of stress, sweat, and tears. Maia's funeral was held on November 3. It was one of the saddest days in my life because I had to say good-bye to an angel on earth. And not only that, I had already missed a week of school. Just hours after the funeral, I had to get on that train and head back. It was very hard.

On the train ride home, I thought about how much I had lost, but I also thought about how much I had gained. I thought about my sister and realized that I needed to forgive myself to have peace within myself. Although I lost her, she would always be my sister and my guardian angel. Her death brought us even closer together. I may have gotten kicked

out of another home, but I was still standing. Somehow Maia's death had caused me to gain strength to do better and be better. I thought, "One day I will have a place of my own." I just needed to work hard to make Maia and my parents proud. I needed to be strong for all of them, and I was going to be.

The following semester, I worked hard. I finally reached a 4.0 GPA and hit the dean's list hard. I was on a workaholic streak, saving my money, and working towards being the kind of adult my uncle could never diminish again.

I know God is watching over me and my parents, too. I also know I've got the newest addition to my guardian angels, Maia.

My golden body is of royal caliber;
I shine with salty diamonds.
The extreme heat has made me crisp.
Curved like Daffy Duck's bill.
I'll fit in the palm of your hand,
But grasp me with a gentle finger.
Crack, Crunch, chew.
Hard enough, yet not hard enough.
Do not mind me flaking.



My fallen diamonds will do you no harm.
My army is vast.
Loaded with mindless clones,
Ready to jump into battle.
Another of the royal family members
Has been taken.
Crack, Crunch, chew.
His destined demise.
Lost in the stomach,
But he is replaceable.

UNTITLED
Kevin Mack

BALANCE

Jasmin Thomas

the purpose for which we have all been chosen,
...to exist
the possibilities are an endless ocean
...the horizon limits us
as we surrender to life's insecurities

certainty is the crop of time
and the depth of doom that reshapes
our thoughts and feelings,
it brings us full circle with the creator,

wholeness
a full glass of sweetness that tickles the taste buds
and satisfies
an apology for not being perfect
but close to being just right.



Abba
Melody C. Johnson

Everything starts with something. In *Medias Res*, This life is by no means epic. Someone is born into a particular family. Someone is angry. Someone gets hurt. Hurt people hurt people. Wailing into the world is how Amelia was born. A city hospital for women. A working father. An inexperienced mother. I think she was wailing in protest; maybe she knew about the anger; maybe she was crying early to ward off the inevitable pain. When she was half a year old, she began whistling. When she was four, she knew all about pain. She knew some of her mother's pain. It was large, and mystical, and belonged to the adult world. So when she floated down from the pine trees in the back yard, or landed from trips to the moon, she remembered her mother's tears and frowns. Amelia had her own pain, but all pain centered on the person called Daddy.

He was like a big dark cloud. When he blew in, the light went out. He spoke of Jesus and did a good job teaching her about God. She knew that when he came home, she was to call on Jesus with all her might and maybe escape a storm and a beating. He would always begin with a sermon. She would always end with welts on her face. She was a squirmer; allergic to dust, mold, grass, mildew, pollen, cats, and dogs. Prone to sneeze. She was always too late to get tissue because once he started a sermon Daddy wouldn't let anyone move for anything, not even to pee. Amelia hated sneezing, hated the warm gobs of translucent snot that sailed out of her nose, blocking air flow, wetting her chin and cheeks and neck, dripping onto her clothes. Most of all, she hated sneezing because of the unmasked disgust it provoked on Daddy's face. When she would sneeze his face would wrinkle in disbelief and anger, as if it were a personal insult. She would lower her head in shame and wipe her nose with the back of her hand. His face would darken with even more disgust.

"You think anybody wanna see that?" he would ask. He would shake his head. "God!"

Amelia never thought to call on Jesus then because what followed had been her fault. She had caused it.

She knew violence before she could spell it. But she didn't know yet to equate violence with wrong. Amelia knew to equate violence with herself. Amelia needed violence done toward her by Daddy. If Daddy didn't do violence towards Amelia, something was wrong. Amelia wouldn't nap if Daddy didn't beat Amelia first. She wouldn't eat until he raised welts on her cheeks. Something about the tears made her calm down. Made her sleepy. She liked it; the sleepiness of weeping, the sun in a heat wave; a nap in direct hot sun for an hour. It started unpleasantly, a strong pain. It was like letting the sun suck all the energy out of your body leaving it sappy and thick like overripe fruit. Heavy and slow, drained and embraced with sweat and humidity. The only course of action after that is a good sleep. You'll wake up with a headache, but no dreams, only peace.

Her mother didn't like
this unhealthy
love of tears.

Her mother didn't like this unhealthy love of tears. She refused to beat Amelia, even if Amelia disobeyed her mother, which strangely enough prompted Amelia to obey; to strive to be a good kid. It took her mother telling her that it was wrong, for Amelia's equation to finally read: Violence against Amelia equals bad. Quick to follow this equation was: Violence against Momma is bad. Slower to follow was Daddy plus Violence against Amelia equals Daddy hates Amelia. That didn't happen until middle school. Likewise, the sum of Daddy plus at home equals stay out of his way and tremble came along in the 6th grade. The equation with the sum of "something's wrong with me," goes back so far Amelia can't remember where it first began.

Pastors usually loved their daughters. Loved them and flaunted them to the whole congregation if they were good daughters. Amelia's Daddy was ordained. He preached, but he only did so when it looked like he could take the church he was preaching at. He didn't have a church of his own and Amelia and her mother paid for it. He would hold them captive for hours preaching to his imagined mega congregation. But when he got a chance to preach as a guest at a church, he would run with it. As if the pastor would hand

over his flock to a new young guy with three hour long sermons and five hour long prayers. His passion for sermons and the Bible; his passion for the pulpit matched his anger. They were of the same strength. Fiery, wild, full; once started, nothing could stop it. He seemed to relish his anger like he relished his sermons; seemed to relish the violence and then say he didn't really want to do whatever it was Amelia and her mother had made him do.

Amelia watched other Daddies, but didn't believe them. Who really kisses their daughter's cheeks in public? Who really smiles at them without a crazed glow of anger in the eyes? Who really lets them go to sleepovers or birthday parties? Who really never grabs the backs of their daughter's necks in public to squeeze until tears prick their eyes? When she began to watch those yucky princess movies, the true essence of the lie became hard to ignore. She couldn't escape the fact her eyes weren't lying, that the Daddies were true. The fact was *her* life was the lie. The rest of the young female population lived with Daddies who rushed in like knights in shining armor after coming to their senses before the movie ended and they missed their chances altogether. She knew her Daddy would never do that, never rush in, never save her. He was the one she needed saving from. Somehow, in the midst of trying to believe that God as a father would do that, she had trouble believing even *He* ever would.

Once upon a time, there was an indignant teenager faced by a ferocious angry older man. This older man was the biggest, meanest, giant of all time. He misused his strength to hurt those

he loved instead of protect them... indeed he protected them so much it ended up bruising them and leaving welts on their faces. He breathed down fire on the young teenage girl for some perceived wrong; for a nose twitch at the wrong time, for a misplaced sneeze, a direct insult to him. Once upon a time that teenager was Amelia and she stood there and got burned. Smoldered. All the pastors Amelia had heard taught that one should never defend oneself even when one was right. "Let vengeance be God's!" She believed them. She took the scorching.

But, there was one day when her Daddy had stormed in from work, angry. He would have hit somebody, Amelia was sure. He had done it before. He was angry that there were dishes in the sink, angry that her mother hadn't moved fast enough to kiss him at the door, angry that she was still working on the last dish for dinner, angry that Amelia was helping her mother cook to make things move faster, angry that Amelia hadn't moved quick enough to hug him, angry that the TV was on and the radio was off, angry that the windows weren't open for light and air, angry that her mother's hair wasn't straightened but in curls, angry that Amelia was looking at him. The greatest common denominator here is angry. Factoring that into her own equation, Amelia got righteous. She raised up in her mind, looked up to the heavenlies and under her breath prayed. "In the Name of Jesus, I take authority over whatever demon is over my Daddy and bind it! I crush it under the throne of Jesus and make it subject to his rule!"

It was like ice water had been doused over her father. He stopped mid-word as if choked and walked out of the house deflated.

It was like ice water had been doused over her father. He stopped mid-word as if choked and walked out of the house deflated. Amelia's eyes widened. The words tumbled out of her mouth as she explained to her mother why her father had left the house. God cared. God worked. He would get them out of this. Most importantly, Daddy was in trouble with the Creator.

She began to use the word judgment then. That New Year, the guest bishop of a mega church spoke and the topic was judgment. She had a vision and the theme was judgment. She had a dream and the interpretation was judgment. It was thick in the air. God was going to judge Daddy for the violence done against her and her mother. From that point on, she tried to warn him. A tree limb fell inches in front of his car after being struck by lightning, one hour after she had seen it in a vision: judgment. Sickness suddenly descended upon his body; judgment. A large painful swelling grew on his arm; judgment.

"Daddy, judgment is when God brings things into the way they should be. He sets what's not right right."

"Mmmhmm."
Brick wall.
Well, judgment had come, and with it, sweet justice.

When Amelia got to college, her mother finally left Daddy. Amelia had been hoping she would. Praying. He seemed to get more violent, more mean, more evil with age. As if he were doing a un holy ripening. He hadn't understood. He thought it was the devil taking away his family. He had thought Amelia was in league with the devil and that she and the devil were convincing her mother that Daddy was a monster. He thought that Amelia and her mother had become lesbian lovers, denying God and nature. He thought that Amelia was trying to be a man and take his place. He thought Amelia was holding a grudge because she had caught him in their house in bed with another woman when she was five and he had lied about it. Amelia felt sorry for him. When he was young, he had dropped out of the eighth grade and gotten arrested for the first time. Once he had tried to rob a bank with some friends.

They had gotten into a taxi and put a gun to the driver's head and told him to drive. They all ended up in jail. Amelia had researched the account and found that it differed from what her Daddy had told her.

"I was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people. Your Daddy didn't do anything. He was just caught up with the wrong folk. The judge could see that by looking at me and he said so. He said, 'Evil communication corrupts good manners.'" Amelia came to believe that he

had told that story so much he must have thought it was true. The record says otherwise. He was holding the gun.

Amelia started visiting a non-traditional multi-cultural baby church. She called it a baby church because it was still growing. A nimbus of light. A sun. It was nothing like the mega church her father had forced the family to go to. She had hated it. All the form, fashion, and disgusting performances and competitions to out praise your neighbor or worse, out shout the woman beside you; get your breast to flap the wildest, your skirt to raise the highest, and your hair to swing the most provocatively to trap the single young preacher of the night. She really loved God, and felt insulted that He had to stomach all that nonsense in His house. Sometime during her youth she had come to believe that God sided with her where her father was concerned.

Then there was this new thing: freedom from violence. She didn't see her Daddy at all, now. Hadn't for a year and wasn't anxious to. The members of the church she was visiting called their pastor Dad, grown men and women alike. Every time she heard them say it, a pain snaked up from her stomach to her heart and bit down with such ferocious vengeance that she felt like she was actually being injected with venom. She couldn't do that. She couldn't call that man Dad, Daddy, Father, Pops, Poppa, Vatti, Vater, Old Man, none of it.



Image: Sisters, by James Wells
from The Smith-Mason Collection
Dept. of Fine & Performing Arts
Prof. Clayton Lang, Curator

Her campus minister told this story. There was a girl who didn't know her father. Each year of her life she waited to see him at her birthday so she could ask him questions. Each year, he failed to show. The honest and familiar cliché. When this girl grew up, she went to college and started looking for her father's love in the beds of the men she dated. She searched so hard she would date multiple men at once. It got so bad that she got caught double timing. She gained a bad and shameful reputation. But one guy, a Christian, encouraged her to come back to school and try again. She did. And the most peculiar thing happened. She gave up dating. It was hard she said, but she had a group of girl friends who held her to her word. And she met her father. Over the phone. Asked the questions she'd stored up over the years. And it hurt. Her friends were there for that too. Later in life, she encountered a pastor. He kept telling her, "I love you, Daughter." She didn't believe him. Thought he wanted something because once another pastor had said that to her and he had really wanted to use her for her body. She had left that church angry, and come to this new one where the pastor told her "I love you, Daughter," nearly every day. Finally, one day she asked, "What's up with you? Why do you keep saying that?" He hugged her long and secure, "I love you, Daughter." And she had wept.

Amelia hadn't been able to connect with the story. She had felt a craving in her heart for such a mystical hug that would break the floodgates of twenty years of Daddy pain. She had wanted a fairytale Daddy like that who would hand out "I love you Daughters" like candy. It was just

something that happened for her campus minister. Not for her. And then there was this preacher guy everyone in the church called Daddy.

There was something about them, the pastor and his wife. They spoke the word in a way that she could understand. She didn't have to wait till next Sunday to come back and see how to apply the word to get a breakthrough in her life. She didn't have to give x amount of dollars for the blessing. She wasn't subjected to a guilt trip and shame if she didn't have money to give in the offering. And they always told her they loved her. She could call the wife Mom. That fell off her tongue easily and she meant it with all her heart. The wife was wise, strong, and well shepherded if Amelia could trust her eyes. She couldn't imagine the pastor everyone called Dad beating her. She knew what a beaten woman looked like. The wife didn't look like that. Amelia could hug her easily.

The church had a culture of hugging; it was their way of welcoming others, of expressing acceptance, warmth and love. Pressing all of the sunny warmth of smiles into arms and squeezing until you knew you were loved. Amelia had met her share of good huggers in the church and that secretly drew her back every Sunday. The hugs weren't sloppily embarrassing, but gently secure and radiating what Amelia imagined God's love felt like. It took her two years to hug the pastor without fear. She wasn't sure what she was afraid of. It was absurd to think that she would see the closed fist of the pastor swinging her way because she reached out for a hug. She wrestled with what to say whenever she would hear, "I love you woman of God," from him. I love you too didn't

make it out of her shocked vocal chords, Thank you felt wounded. Mmmhmm was disrespectful. She ended up croaking or just staying silent; nodding with a watery smile. And feeling stupid.

The pastors became pregnant. Amelia felt their excitement like lightning in the sky. It was a girl. They were going to have a daughter. In the wife's third month of pregnancy, Amelia joined the church. She decided that if for three years the word she'd heard from them and applied to her life had worked for her, there was something at the church worth staying for, worth committing to. She knew that she'd have to start calling the pastor Dad and meaning it. No one would make her. Not even the pastor would make her. He wouldn't feel hurt if she didn't, she was sure he could care less as long as she respected him. But, she knew that if these two were the people God had given her to pastor her with His own heart, she needed to call him "Dad" and keep calling the pastor's wife "Mom." She was beginning to feel more and more like God had chosen them both to represent His heart for and to her. And no one had to tell her that she had Daddy issues. She decided she would try to see the pastor as a new "Dad." Of course there was only one Father, and Amelia knew Him.

What she didn't know was how He fit into her life as Daddy. These two, the pastor and his wife, could maybe show her how.

"I love you, woman of God."

Amelia choked on a cough. "I love you too... Dad." She swallowed.

She had gotten a brief smile of understanding. She plunged into the pastor's wife's

arms and held tight a little longer than she had meant to.

"Love you, sweetie," the pastor's wife said.

"Love you too, Mom," Amelia said. Her voice was back.

Then the little girl came. She was a tiny light bundle, tucked up in pink and smelling of strawberries and baby powder. The pastor's wife stayed home with her for the first weeks. Amelia missed her, but saw the pictures on Facebook. She was beginning to see something new about Daddies.

The pastor glowed when he talked about his little girl. Even when he was talking about the hardship of waking up in the middle of the night to change a diaper, he beamed. Amelia was struck with this thought in the middle of a sermon when her pastor was using his newborn to illustrate the heart of God once again: *He loves her.*

The girl started to walk. She was always dressed like a princess. Cute as an angel. Amelia would watch as the little one would stumble after her father and reach up. All the baby knew was that her Daddy was hers and that if her arms reached up, he would pick her up. It didn't matter what he was doing; preaching a sermon, stacking chairs, talking to grownups, if her arms went up, he would pick her up.

"Whatever you're doing, God, would you pick me up?" Amelia asked. She caught herself. But just as she did, she felt a warm presence surround her. It was soft and still and thick. It was her. "Yes, I would." She was able to call her pastor Dad a little easier after that. Her throat didn't feel as scratchy nor the word as alien as before. She was

able to see him as a window into the secret world of Daughters. She was able to see the baby as a portal into the unknown. The baby was preaching. Preaching daughtership.

Sunday after Sunday Amelia would sneak peeks at the baby as she cooed in her father's arms. She laughed when he picked her up. She smiled in contentment when he held her on his shoulder. She understood. She was getting a glimpse of how God saw her. How God loved Amelia. Every Sunday, at the end of the sermon she would be sure to say, "I love you, too Dad."

He wasn't her father. Biologically. Spiritually, yes. But she would never be fathered in the physical way the baby was being fathered. Never picked up, tickled, cuddled, smothered in kisses. But she was seeing it. And as she was seeing it, she was realizing God had given her this gift in Himself.

"How do you submit to fathering?" she asked her campus minister. She sat in the office on the third floor of the campus library chipping the cracked red nail polish on her nails. She had spent all of her life trying to protect herself from bad fathering that she didn't know how to accept the godly fathering she was getting at church.

"Well, I think you said it," her campus minister had said. "You have to submit, or come under the mission, and let the person speak into your life as a father. That means obeying."

Amelia had nodded. She understood. But she felt adulthood creeping up and destroying her inclination to obey. Submit she could do; obey was harder. When she heard submit, she could imagine her pastors struggling to lift a heavy

object, a table. In her mind she saw herself and the other members of the church rush in to help lift the load. That appealed to her. She could do that. When she heard obedience a strong stone settled in the pit of her stomach. Obey had always been followed by "or feel my wrath." She'd never had a positive result from obeying her father in her youth. It always ended in pain no matter what she did or didn't do.

Her pastor asked her to stack chairs, and she did so. He asked her to set up a table, and she did it. He asked her if she'd like to join worship team, and she did. She had thought he would ask her to do something out of her reach. The next shelf up. He never yelled at her like she expected. He never got angry if she made one of her many mistakes like spilling water on the display table or singing into a microphone she had forgotten to turn on.

Amelia learned a new lesson about fathers during the church's volleyball night. They played on teams and that night, Dad was on her team. They won. She learned that when you have the support of the father, there's nothing you can't do. She remembered the high-fives he gave all around. She remembered the feeling of victory mixed with sportsmanship. She remembered the team work, the sets, the passes, the goals. She was sure they won because of Dad.

All through the game he had miraculously appeared to rescue her and the other ten members of their team when they missed a hit. It was like he was everywhere at once. He had saved her from falls and the fast flying ball, and taught her how to hit and set the ball. By the end

of the game, Amelia had improved her skill. "This is what a father does," she thought. "That's what God does." She sounded like one of those yucky gushy cliché princess movies, but she didn't mind. Sometimes fairytales are real.

There were moments when she had to remember that she was accepting his fathering. Mainly when he preached a message on Christian maturity. Amelia listened as he encouraged the flock to believe the bible and use faith, to make daily confessions, to be professional Christians, to be big girls and big boys. Amelia felt herself striving, her heart reaching for the picture Dad painted. The picture of a strong woman walking in faith, believing and applying the word. A big girl. She felt like she was growing up again and had somehow gotten thrown back into the shapeless years of teenage-hood.

He promised not to preach his opinion. He promised to teach the word. He was keeping his promise. Mom was the same. There was safety for Amelia in that. She knew she wouldn't get the glitzy sensationalism of the mega church here. She wouldn't get a "come down to the altar and give fifty dollars and in three days you're gonna get a breakthrough and if God don't do it in three days you're getting setup for a setback for a comeback for a boomerang for a turnaround for a breakthrough!" from her pastors. She would get word straight. This is what the bible says, this is what you should be doing. Do the word. Grown-up church. No coddling. It was a call to mature. A call to not only hear the word, but to also apply it and then celebrate the results. There was a time for milk, but they were moving into meat.

Here is the story of the statistical fatherless girl. The story of the girl born into a violent home. Who grows up. Who gets into drugs or sex or both. Who gets pregnant or overdoses. Who marries an abuser and all roads lead to death. Amelia knows that story. That is not her story. Everything has to start somewhere. In Medias Res?

Amelia has this wall in her dorm room on campus. She taped a large sheet of paper to it and wrote YAHWEH Elohim across the top. Whenever she sees a new father-like quality of God expressed through her pastors, she writes it on the wall. It's running out of space. She took it in while standing in her dorm room one day, just to stare and wonder. It's got, "Faithful," "Strong," "Secure," "Loving," "Just," "Fair," "Good," "Proud," "Patient," and a bunch of others scribbled across its surface in multicolored, permanent marker. All attributes her pastor had exhibited as he stood in to represent God's heart for the congregation. What caught her eye that day was an "I love you, woman of God." She hugged the paper that day while listening to her favorite worship song, "Just a Little While Longer," and began to weep. Suddenly she wasn't hugging a wall with a flimsy paper tacked to it. She was hugging Daddy God.

Within

Winston Stokes



Of all the things that I can think or ever even mention
There is nothing that is more worthy of my attention
Than the beauty that resides in you which entices my intuition.
We tend to look outward yet what matters lies inside
You may think you're powerless, but you're a fascinating being
Who is often not seeing,
That every time I lay eyes on you
A beauty lingers deep within my dreams,
If you have not figured it out by now,
I think you are a Queen.

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