

## The Prism

Dark, green leaves and sticky heat,  
Dewy tendrils caressing bugs—  
That's what is this jungle,  
This bed of wild and danger.  
We left the ship for this fresh stench,  
For this dense and sense of stranger.  
What they said we'd find we found  
And thus we are en garde.  
We've met strength that looks like men  
But oddlier, foreign.  
Primitive mumblings.  
Creatures are these,  
Creatures indeed.  
One might say they're sleekish  
Due to the sweaty black,  
But conclude in fact it's freakish  
To be so bloody black.  
Before their capture what we beheld!  
It's wild, berserk and rhythmic!  
No subtlety and no finesse,  
No demonstrated sanity,  
And no requisite vanity.  
Such movements.....  
Animals stand as men.

They're not bangles, maybe so  
But the beasts need mighty measures.  
Hence a shackle here—  
Hence a shackle there.  
Who wouldn't do the s(h)ame?  
Some cried when we took them;  
So human the tears that fell.  
Too the shrieks and too the screams  
Prove the beasthood we beheld.

Their chicanery might have cost us.  
Such a human ruse, daunting.  
But we carry on.  
Bravely.  
Fairly.  
Scant cruelty.  
Rough seas, mean rains, rare sun  
Make weary sailors vapid.  
Some excuses for abuses  
We regret, bewail, don't quite condone.

Anchors down, the shores are reached—  
We've most of us survived.  
Our beasts in chains seem tentative,  
Hesitant and lost.  
Their mutterings are quieter,  
Glances less than angry.  
That lion's fight is not yet gone  
But eyes can't lid defeat.  
Some of us now cheerier—  
Nay, we're almost martyrs.  
We will give these blacks a home!  
Give these blacks some means!  
They'll not have to forage  
In pesky damp and risk.  
They'll do some simple work  
And such for simple fare.  
The climate would be similar—  
A nod and a wink, good job.  
They'd surely get familiar--  
Handshakes all around.  
Yes, we were feeling kind,  
Ignored the vague nausea,  
Sweat-drenched dreams.

Our duty is now done.  
Back again to farther shores.  
We will need thousands  
Of these newly tethered,  
Newly welcomed hands.

## II

I own a vastness  
And I've bought some fine fettered men,  
Though I've never seen the like  
(And it's not that I dislike).  
Big and black and strong—  
Fierce, I think, and sly.  
A few are even beautiful  
And some seem downright keen.  
They're from the deeps of Africa,  
The center of splendor gone crude.

Most of them obey  
But most of them resent.  
Punishment  
Punishment  
Punishment  
Is not absent.  
One must enforce the rules.  
Since much like beast,  
A whip is just that must,  
And my stand-up peers agree,  
Nod their heads, "of course".

By and by we get along.  
They understand their place,  
Come to terms with race.  
These beings are not fiends,  
Just not quite you and I.  
And the female variety  
Offers satiety.  
Fetching--  
Alluring—  
Devious.  
(I know it's what she intended).

Tension is filling our days.  
Those that don't know  
Question this show  
And are forcing our noble hands.  
And I will fight fight fight  
For what is right.  
What is right.  
What is right?

The land is turning red.  
Blood seeps into branches  
And stains the sky.  
Misery, misery  
Is a swath.  
Where is comfort for this honest man?  
A deluge of battle—  
An unwieldy war—  
And illness that reckons with evil.  
How did this begin  
For the slightest sin?

But now I've said the wretched word.  
It could have been a sin.  
These could in fact be men.  
No conviction in fighting,  
I offer this waving white.  
I offer late freedom  
To my awkward companions.

### III

My sweet, black Maisy  
Has been with us some time.  
We're a border state,  
But have no hate  
For this strong yet gentle kind.  
Maisy can be trusted.  
She's got her own to tend.  
She may not be clever,  
But I've begun teaching  
And her eyes are very sharp—  
Seeking, absorbing, resolute,  
The beginning of quietly smart.  
As I said,  
She has her own clan.  
Her fair husband Jeffrey  
Is our other hand,  
And her little ones play afield.  
While ours are thus concealed.  
I've thought of them mingling—  
Children are children.  
But what if some essence  
Of which I know not  
Goes into the minds of my young?  
Goes quietly creeping and thusly infecting?  
Yes, we are so alike  
But I'm no clairvoyant!  
What I can't see  
May still exist,  
And if it's vile  
Then we are undone,  
Probably perished I fear.

Still they wish to frolic,  
My little ones and her little imps.  
I finally broke and they played.  
My eyes were braced for naught,  
Will O' Wisp poised,  
And hand at the ready.  
But  
Strifeless, harmless amblings.  
Tripping, bubbling, mimicking.  
And Maisy just smiled and knew.  
Assumption or presumption?  
I will not admit wisdom.

Yet this is trivia, trivia.  
Cursed rumblings bother the righteous.  
White sheeted men  
Mean harm  
Mean hate  
Mean blood.  
We lost Maisy's man to treachery.  
The night rife with screams  
That since have my dreams  
Been causing the ruin of days.  
Those triangle men  
Tied him and beat him  
And put torch to the home of these friends.  
Ended him  
Without even seeing him end.  
We watched in shame as he died.  
Maisy saw me weep,  
But her eyes held no pity  
And even a trace  
Of "You too are guilty".

What good was that bloody war  
If now cowards might cloak such hate?  
More north still we must  
To be rid of this lust.  
We can't escape it, but shall avoid it,  
This atrocity, monstrosity, truth.

#### IV

Mother, said John, Jimmy's my best friend.

*Yes, Mother said, so what of it then?*

Well, why's he not in school?

*Gosh John, they've different rules.*

But Mother, he should be learning.

*He's learning but somewhere else.*

Well, said John, then I'll go there.

*No you won't and don't you dare.*

But Mother this makes no sense.

*It does, his school is special.*

Is that what's really fair?

*It's true that it's separate,*

*But it's also nearly equal.*

Mother, said John, why's Jimmy way in back?

*Because we are in the front.*

Well then I'll go back there.

*No you won't and don't you dare.*

How about Jimmy next to me?

*That makes no sense, be still.*

But this is nuts, he's my best friend.

*And the same he'll be at this ride's end.*

#### V

1965

Took awhile, but has arrived.

Roses and Parks,

Lovely the image—

So that's the end of that

(at least the legal facts).

## VI

Two men playing basketball,  
Sweating and shining—  
Jostling and spinning.  
Black and white rubbing skin,  
Black and white exchanging grins.  
Shoot the ball,  
Defend it.  
Love the game,  
And honor it.

Both men clanking drinks  
And talking manly tripe.  
Constant nods and I-know-what-you-means.  
Heeding, but viscous vision,  
Seeking dames or any action—  
The boys don't see  
The you and color me.

“Nor should that be.”  
Agreed and then some.  
How long we been friends?  
“Too long, but this is cool.”  
Know it is you fool.  
“So what happened long ago,  
And do you need compensation?  
Would that be our salvation?”  
Too late, too late you simpleton,  
The time, it is at hand.  
We're close, we're friends, we're pals,  
But we must, we should, we have to.  
“I must ask--  
Since that is past--,  
Why is us a must?”  
Look around you, white boy--  
There's a brewing on the rise.  
Too much Spanish Brown  
Is in our next sunrise.