

Poetry Portfolio

Selected Published Poems
by Tameca L Coleman

site: www.tamecacoleman.com

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/tamecalcoleman/>

CV: <https://www.visualcv.com/tameca-l-coleman>

***more writing samples available upon request**

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Damballa

Old Yoruban saying says,
 “If you can walk you can...”

With the blinds drawn tight and sun on the pane, I dance.

Neighbors can't see the outline of limb's shadows
 waving

and signing
 behind the shades.

I sway,
 Stamp to my CD drummers.

I am sweat and flush and labored breath,
 some priestess of snakes
 guiding a procession
 of silk
 clad ladies
 across
 a snake charmed floor.

Our arms
 slither like waxed and red scales.

We are solitarians
 crossing trees for coils
 of rest.

Fingers flicker like tongues
 lapping onto soft palettes.

We dance,
 feel drumbeats spiral up through thighs, bellies, chests, arms...

We dance
 until hoods raised, backs swayed, hips and spines thrive...

We dance
 until we've forgotten the meaning of the song,
 and it does not matter if we know all the steps.

Mermaid, 1969

When Mom wasn't making cakes
 or practicing her off island dialect
 of Japanese to the scowling market ladies,
 when she wasn't taking classes on ikebana,
 when my sister and I were not at school
 on the Kadena air force base,
 she drove us across Okinawa.
 We'd hang out of the windows,
 hair plastered to our necks, enthralled
 by green on green, terraces and vineyards and jungles
 green, women with baskets on their heads
 traveling down the road in their bare feet.
 We passed cart-driven men, their ox carrying
 bundles of sugarcane. We left them in dust,
 giggled as we passed, waved and smiled,
 pointed until Mom made us stop.

These were the best times for me:
 When the car arrived at the reef,
 after we'd seen the oranges, yellows,
 and the reds of the sun setting over the water,
 after fried chicken and Nehi soda,
 after the first sighting of stars,
 we hunted cowries with our flashlights,
 the drying starfish and conk shells there.
 We found shells nicked by seagull beaks,
 with something inside of them, still living.
 We found sea glass, coins, trinkets, sand
 dollars and oyster shells.

One night there was a woman
 balanced on a rock over the water.
 She was just sitting there, running
 a comb through her impossible length
 of hair. At first I thought
 her a mermaid, but her feet
 folded to her side like arms
 hugging in close. Her tattered
 skirt and ill-fitted blouse
 waved in the cooling night.
 Her hair, greyed-black, whipped
 at the rock, just as the air force jets
 sped across the sky on their courses

to and from Vietnam.

She became a silhouette against the sunset,
etched behind my eyes, forever.

a strawberry field in Oregon, summer of '96

My beau, smiling in the sun, cracking jokes in Spanish
never looked so bright, crouched in the fields
with his friends.

The ladies, too, wives,
buckets full already, gossip and laugh,
and I'm trying to pick faster.

My beginner's Spanish,
my 1/10th full bucket of berries,
my wobbling ankles and lips already cracking;
no hat for sun, and clothes
too warm for this — I'm only 40 minutes in,
feeling faint and weak.

I'd like to taste
a berry, juicy, sun-warmed,
straight from the bush,
but I need water, shade,
and a bushel or two.
No time to pick for me.

I am a tourist here
and when the farmer comes
looking after the workers,
poking fun as they blink,
throwing a bonus of Taco Bell
to supplement a pittance, I turn,
lips quivering, tongue
sticking in my mouth, telling him
I speak perfect English.

I sing love ballads through the wall
because it is far more simple to pitch
screaming tantrums right back at them. Their fights
are not unfamiliar to me. I've thrown
lamps, furniture, a man against brick
only to hear them all break. I sing
because she cries in the tub every night
and he tosses his hands, eyes following
her upstairs and into the apartment;
The door slams, clicks locked. Something heavy thumps
hard on the floor. They love one another
so needfully, they choke. She is inside,
an embryo floating in the bathtub.
He batters the door sobbing, "LET ME IN."

Egg

the desert demands
a new

view

when waiting is a death

pop out the eye
turn the retina
inside out

turn out lungs
make the heart

speak

reverse

the gut soften
bone let

follow
flesh innards wrapped blood and bone paste

a shell

in bright sun the exterior
blinds

peck away the interior

the protective eye has become
a waiting that is a life

*for publications list, visit my CV over here: <https://www.visualcv.com/tameca-l-coleman>

