

LEONE ROSS

Sample Writings

COVENANT

TASTING SONGS

MUDMAN

DRAG

FAÇADE

COVENANT

Obsidian III, North Carolina State University

She sat there in my living room, wiggling her dirty toes and sticking out those perfect, nineteen-year-old breasts. You know the perky ones that don't need a bra? I never had breasts like that. We told her that there was nothing wrong with Abe's sperm, just me, barren, empty, the problem. Abe was trying to go on like it was a small thing while he was talking; I guess he was trying to make me feel better. But it was a big thing. And when we were done, the little bitch just sat there, wiggling her toes, looking confused.

"So...Missa Abe, me an' you...?" she said.

I could have killed her for saying it, but I just looked at her toes, and she looked at her toes. They were bright fuschia pink, and I kept thinking that it looked like the fuschia on my nightstand, and why the hell did she think she had a right to pink toenails, anyway, and I kept thinking that she wore it better than I did.

Abe laughed. He was like a little pickney in a toy store, and I wondered whether he was enjoying it. He put a hand on her shoulder. I stood there thinking, you should be touching my shoulder, I'm the one who needs it. I watched that hand and I wondered how it would change if he gained weight, or if he lost weight, or how it would look after years of a cold climate, and what the bones looked like underneath. And he said, "No, no, Hagar. Not at all like that. I'll provide you with the um...sperm..."

She didn't say anything, but there was a little smile on the end of her face. Abe tried again: "You know, Hagar. I will...um...get some of my sperm and give it to you, and what you need to do is..." then he looked at me. Woman's business, I could hear him thinking. So I said, "'Hagar, what me and Mr Abe want you to do is take some of his spirit, you know, spirit? And put it inside your body, in your privates. It has to be a special time. When do you see your monthlies?"

She giggled. The little bitch giggled, with her bleeding, fertile self. Still, maybe I'm not being fair to her. She was only a country girl, and ignorant. I was just getting ready to feel sorry for her when she looked up straight into my husband's face. There was a blazing sun in each eye.

"I can only do it God way," she said. We stared at her. I don't think Abe knew what she meant right away, but you know I knew what she meant. "If you want it, me have to do it...God way. "

From **TASTING SONGS**

DARK MATTER, Warner Books

I transformed Brianna's apartment into a studio and worked furiously, my new lover stepping around the equipment, anxious that she not damage anything. I slid my lens across her gleaming skin. I shot her bald head from the depths of a coconut tree. I cross-referenced her pores with her eyes and caught her as whizzing demigoddess; a wanton tease; a child; running across the parking lot; naked, rolled in dirt and sand like a zebra; tiptoed, capturing the sweet arch of her back; rough and ready as a ragamuffin; as dance hall queen; as prostitute; as maid. She was the most adaptable model I'd ever had. And water, yes, water everywhere. I poured food colouring into her palms and together we watched, enthralled, as she made a mauve waterfall in her back garden, the liquid pouring from her, spraying into the air in lovely droplets, in sumptuous curves, simmering in the heat of our country. I made her lift her hands above her head and clicked my shutter as she rained on herself, and it was amazing to watch her laugh. To watch my wife laugh, delighted that I had found a muse, happy in the smoky pretence of her husband's growing ability. I never thought she would find out. Truly. If she couldn't see it in the glow of Brianna's eyes, I guessed that I'd done all I could do.

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'Jerry, I need some money.'

'What for?' I rolled over and tweaked her nipple, then brought one of her fingers up and watched liquid mount her aureole.

'The operation,' she said. I looked at her, startled. 'I've decided to do it anyway. My voice is what's most important, and Warners is just going to have to take that.'

'Ah...' I was shocked, now. 'You still want the operation?'

She frowned. 'I always told you that.'

'Yes, but...' I was suddenly embarrassed. I thought that my old magic had transformed her, that the pictures were enough. Hadn't I excised my mother's pain with a single photograph?

She looked at me, suddenly comprehending. She laughed, splashing my cheek. 'You actually think pretty pictures make it all OK?'

'No, no, I mean, this has been a problem all your life...' I lied. I fixed my face into sympathy.

She laughed again. 'You are so arrogant, baby. So sweet with the arrogance.' She got off the bed, her body twisting into parenthesis.

'There's another reason why I need money.'

'Yes?'

'I'm pregnant.'

From **MUDMAN**

Time Out London Short Stories, Volume II

When the black girl arrives at school Matthew sees the fire in her belly from as far as twenty paces. He watches her walk through the school as if she is balancing on broken glass. He watches her erase the laughter in the faces of the boys who take Aunt Susu's nursing money, leaving the imprint of their delicate hands on his skin. The black girl's name is Marsha and she is hard as Matthew is soft. She takes one boy by a handful of his golden hair and spits in his face. Marsha is brave for Matthew and he loves her as much as his mother loved his father.

Matthew has nothing to give her, but he murmurs fragrant Jamaican songs into her plaits. She has never heard songs like this. She calls him jungle bunny, this girl who is the same colour as him but has never seen green hills. She tells him stories of cold rain that makes no noise on the roof, and he tries to tell her what crickets sound like. They travel on the underground together, staring and giggling at women who kiss, watching rows of hands that disappear into newspapers. One day when Matthew is singing in Marsha's ear, a drunken man with dawn-sprung eyes tries to make the carriage join in. He tells the children they are beautiful. They are too afraid to smile, but they watch him sing a rousing solo, listening to the carriage people ignore him.

God is good to Matthew. He gets him a job as a conductor on the buses. God chuckles down from pulpits in churches, bleeding and rib-bound, as Matthew makes the money to marry Marsha. He cools Matthew's brow when people pinch their coins between finger and thumb, never touching Matthew's pink palms. Matthew likes his work. He sings as much as he can and always says thank you and please and have a nice day, young lady. Matthew sings the songs his mother taught him, wedges his hips between the shiny seats and brushes his head against the bus top. Matthew's customers complain that he cannot sing. They do not mean that. What they mean is that his songs are sad and that they cannot bear their homesickness. Matthew bows his head when he is told to stop singing, and his eyes are white mud.

From **DRAG**

Brown Sugar, Dutton-Plume

Today I feel like a drag queen. Walking down Soho way through the tourists and the cat-calls. My crotch is aching under the good jeans and the bad underwear, watching the freaks go by, acres of eyeliner and jangly earrings and crap t-shirts that pass for fashion, walking and making sure my hips sway in calypso circles.

Today I feel like a drag queen. The top layer of me is a bouncin' an' behavin' woman; I'm all rounded tits and a belly button so deep you could play strip poker inside it. But underneath that I feel like a boy. Eighteen years old, slim hips, shoulders so strong I could carry the world, baby-soft face and mascara eyes. The boy in me lengthens my stride and gives me attitude. He looks out from under my eyelashes. I'm working it. I'm being seen. I'm shimmying.

"The only thing I want to drink more than a beer tonight is you."

I look up. He's not my type. His head would bang into doorways. We couldn't dance; I'd be stuck just above his navel. I don't like liquorice flavoured men. But today the boy inside me needs a fuck. From any body.

He's leaning against a porn shop; I can see those plastic ribbon thingies that they insist you pass through, like a time machine. I think that his face is open, that it reminds me of a child's. He is even yummy, with a second glance.

I look at him. Grin.

"Going inside?" I say.

"No." He laughs.

"Come inside with me," I say.

We wander around the interior. It's dark and silly and small waves of embarrassed men part before us. They try to pretend that none of us are there. I pick up the worse of the porn, speak loudly, point out come shots and women dressed as little girls; I even find a puzzled, swollen donkey. We discuss measurements at the tops of our voices, pretending to be serious. Men begin to leave. The proprietor looks indignant. I turn more pages and laugh in my boy's face. Watch our arms, side by side, both bruise coloured. His lips thrust through graceful stubble.

"What's your name?" he says.

"Jo," I reply.

He looks amused. As if he knows.

"Joanna? Josephine? "

"Just Jo, call me Jo," I say.

"I'm Jason," he says. I like the way he says his name. Like it fits him; like he's new. Like he's the only Jason in the world. The proprietor grimaces and rolls his eyes. We are nearly alone in the shop. The last man is trying not to look me in the face as he wriggles past us. He wants to fuck me, but he doesn't want me to see that. Jason moves to let him go by; I love that he does not try to protect me from the lust in the man. He stands next to me, trusting me in my own space, like I'm his equal. Like I'm strong.

Back at my flat he lays me across my bed, in between pages of my thesis. I am writing about black people in British ads. Like, how there are none. He doesn't care. The

head of his dick is swollen and purple-red. He is watching me closely. I tighten the muscles in my stomach, flex my shoulders. I want my body to feel like concrete when he touches me. I run my hands along my thighs, pretending the hair there is pepper-grains. I'm holding the bunch of roses he bought me in Leicester Square. Tight. A thorn sticks through my flesh and I can feel a tiny bead of blood on my palm.

From **FAÇADE**
England Calling, Orion Press

Meg lived for the nights. She had to find him. The memory of his face kept her in multi-coloured daydream through the halls. She stole from her classes and ran to the toilets, shutting herself in, fondling herself harshly, rubbing her crotch against the securely locked door. Her orgasms left her sobbing but triumphant at the weakness of her flesh. She wanted him. They could marry and he would dance and she would study and support him and believe in his art. She walked the dance floor, questioning endlessly. She forgot the shyness that had paralysed her. Someone had to know. Who was he? A tall man promised to tell her and she didn't protest as she knelt between his legs, watching him unzip himself. His genitals smelt like rubber as she moved forward and blew onto his skin, unsure. He cackled.

“Yer having a laugh. Suck it!”

She swallowed him, his movements jerky and careless against her cheeks. She swallowed like a pro and went for another strawberry drink when he laughed at her unanswered questions. The dancer's androgyny worked on her blood. Meg shook. Her hands, her lips. Shook. And still, feverishly, she passed through the place, asking.

“Can you help me, the dancer, do you know his name?”

When he was onstage she subsided, gaunt, to the very edge of the dais, drinking in his madness, longing for his empty eyes. They all knew her now. She saw them smile in recognition as she stepped through the crowd. They called him The Dancer, or The Dancer Bloke.

“You want to know who The Dancer is? We all want to know.”

She would find out for them. She would know, she would be the keeper of the secret. The blue of her mother's bible drove her out of her mind. The gentle cleaning, the moan of the clock, worked at her. Her body shrank, skin to the bones, the hair to the scalp. And she shook and waited.