

## Two Hours After My Brother Called

beaten up and arrested for writing  
down a badge number of a sergeant who was beating  
up a black kid who was standing with his hands up,  
the sergeant handed me the personal  
effects they took from him -- a satchel and shopping bag  
full of books, mostly -- so "nothing will get lost"  
while they held my brother handcuffed to a cell full of other people,  
mostly black and threadbare, handcuffed to the cell.  
As he lay curled on his jacket, spread on the filthy  
tile like a dog's mat, the cuffed hand above his head  
like that of a person waiting  
to say something, I wanted to grab the gun  
from this phony polite bastard of a sergeant, I wanted to start  
cursing all of them, their ridiculous  
story that he "interfered in an arrest"  
of a stranger, and "risked a policeman's life,"  
that he "resisted arrest," that he was "assaulting an officer,"  
when they tore his arms back and crunched his wrists;  
I wanted to tear up the stickers  
on the sergeant's desk phone with numbers  
for Free Phone Sex, help my brother to his feet,  
and drive him home, take him to a newspaper office, to a bar,  
even as I left him there,  
bewildered, beaten, tired...  
But this is a lie -- I didn't  
have a brother to call that night  
though I spent most of it inventing one--  
the assured, stubborn rage I couldn't  
feel any longer, the refusal to leave  
quietly with my books...  
My father did come, and he argued  
with me about moving my car,  
about the comments I made to the sergeant...  
He told me he'd have a lawyer at the arraignment,  
though "they don't come cheap," and I was broke  
then, and still am. But this loneliness...  
like the dust I closed my eyes in, the  
hopeless, bold chatter that stayed on with the white lights  
over both sides of the bars -- 2 hours,  
4 hours, 24, 42... the cell more stripped  
of familiar presences than anything I know  
how to write -- this last loneliness,  
it just is, and it is, and it is.

#1

Calabash, mahoe, sea grapes, and manchineel  
are trees I learned from Skoka Zumi, who brought  
us, unasked, each day what fruits or flowers he might  
buy conversation with, and an excuse to steal

toward us when we walked the beach in the moonlight  
or dawn I love. Filth crusted, with hints  
of dreadlocks, solicitude, and an account  
that switched from growing up near the next

beach on a dirt floor, to an orphanage  
he escaped in Kenya, to jumping a merchant  
ship in Port Said, his patois changed

to New York street slang. And all this  
for what? If kingdom come, and hand join hand  
in starlight, the lost will still be lost.

Under starlight the lost are no less lost--  
the ones half sane, frozen and starved in silence  
so long they can't be found by the police  
who kidnapped them, their arctic shacks lost in blizzards

of vanished papers. Or the one they dragged  
from the barn past midnight who was found  
punching a dead horse. And those lost  
closer to home, haunting high school reunions

to convince classmates they have changed  
after twenty years. Even in starlight—  
the one banging on cell bars in code

remains lost, dreaming a rumor will start,  
whispered, from one cell to the next—  
*I am here— and writing. Please listen.*

*I am here now and writing--please listen,*  
is how the clear-eyed, peasant-bloused girl I once met  
above a tarn and failed to talk past kissing  
while we lay under the stars late that night,

began the letter, which, out of nowhere, came—  
months afterward from the "spiritual center"  
that turned out to be the New Hampshire home  
of Reverend Moon's church. And two years later

it was she who startled me out of blankness  
on a Manhattan street corner: *No — forget*  
*about the donation -- it's me, Denise,*

and it was, until two men in suits led her  
away, something unspeakably human that breathed,  
startled, standing naked in clear water.

Naked, knee-deep in clear blue water  
and matching crew cuts, two guys worked  
back to front, the jerk-jerk of a farmyard  
oil jack. Above the boulders and rocks

where the beach ends, the halter-topped, pert  
fourteen-year-old who had blown bangs from her eyes  
while teasing me into buying her a quart  
of Cruzan hollered out, *Cutie-pies...*

(as the law-school guys who'd brought her there told  
it) *Hey, y'all -- it looks to me like AIDS  
is spreading"* They neither quickened nor slowed—  
between surf, beach, and orange-pink clouds,

among changing, coral tones of turquoise—  
these aching jewels for shifting, lovesick eyes.

Her aching jewels and blood-rimmed, lovelorn eyes --  
sad fakes of Barbara Bush's constant pearls  
were what the lady wore who mailed *all the ideas*  
*to Geraldo for the special he did on girls*

*who marry their rapists. And why do you think*  
*that snake never thanked me?* Supine, eyes closed  
under the small schooner's jib sail—*Your best*  
*day yet among the unspoiled British Virgins!*

I put a towel on my face, and, sun-drunk,  
let the wind and rigging take her story to sea.  
Yet it wafted back, with the startling clarity  
of a voice heard in a dream or across a lake,

*They didn't think I'd last out this year—*  
*I came alone, to see the Virgins once more.*