

1992

# Work

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## Five Poems · *Yusef Komunyakaa*

### WORK

I won't look at her.  
My body's been one  
Solid motion from sunrise,  
Leaning into the lawnmower's  
Roar through pine needles  
& crabgrass. Tiger-colored  
Bumblebees nudge pale blossoms  
Till they sway like silent bells  
Calling. But I won't look.  
Her husband's outside Oxford,  
Mississippi, bidding on miles  
Of timber. I wonder if he's buying  
Faulkner's ghost, if he might run  
Into Colonel Sartoris  
Along some dusty road.  
Their teenage daughter & son sped off  
An hour ago in a red Corvette  
For the tennis courts,  
& the cook, Roberta,  
Only works a half day  
Saturdays. This antebellum house  
Looms behind oak & pine  
Like a secret, as quail  
Flash through branches.  
I won't look at her. Nude  
On a hammock among elephant ears  
& ferns, a pitcher of lemonade  
Sweating like our skin.  
Afternoon burns on the pool  
Till everything's blue,  
Till I hear Johnny Mathis

Beside her like a whisper.  
I work all the quick hooks  
Of light, the same unbroken  
Rhythm my father taught me  
Years ago: *Always give  
A man a good day's labor.*  
I won't look. The engine  
Pulls me like a dare.  
Scent of honeysuckle  
Sings black sap through mystery,  
Taboo, law, creed, what kills  
A fire that is its own heart  
Burning open the mouth.  
But I won't look  
At the insinuation of buds  
Tipped with cinnabar.  
I'm here, as if I never left,  
Stopped in this garden,  
Drawn to some Lotus-eater. Pollen  
Explodes, but I only smell  
Gasoline & oil on my hands,  
& can't say why there's this bed  
Of crushed narcissus  
As if gods wrestled here.

### SPRINGTIME JITTERBUG

A torpid eye squints open, hungry  
For spring, as lovers walk hip to hip.  
Another eye peers from a knothole,  
& underneath a crescendo of leaves

A new heart begins to plea with the soil.  
Something unseeable sings open the flawed mouth,  
Harmonizing with Ella & Satchmo as "I Won't Dance"  
Spins on the turntable. A thrush