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Night Visits

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Jas. Mardis

I don’t know. One night I was tucking her in
and the next night I was crawling in bed with her . . .
—an incest father

NIGHT VISITS

Tonight
as I break the silent threshold
of my daughter’s doorway
to plant the final goodnight blessing
to seek the sureness of her comfort
to fret away the final
under-the-bed monsters
    that await her urgent potty sprint

Tonight
I am counting the steps
    of this night visit
and measuring the frequency
    of my rising breaths
from my chest through my mouth
     checking the realm of this daddy ritual
for the errant call of a fractured wanting

I want to be sure that
    no more than four breaths
quiver the tiny hairs of her brow
    that no more than
a lightly mussed shadow
     breaks the stillness of her covers

I want to be certain
    that my steps and the final cradle of her head
takes no more than
seven seconds
on each of these night visits

and that her brow is never furred by my presence
either sleeping or awake

Because
  I have watched the wives
  cradle
  what was left of their child
somewhere between mother, new friend and mistress

Because
  I have known that the tiny faces
must have silently cringed into the abyss of confusion

    when the eyes revealed
    that the Saviour from this pain
is the bringer of this pain

Tonight
as I break the still silent threshold
  of my daughter’s doorway
    back into the dimly lighted hall
back to the sureness of
  not having fallen toward the hellish
fray of that
  from-Heaven-falling
of that
  drowning mixture of confused need
and soured panting

I am wondering
  which doorway is being broken
which pink covers are tonight
being daddy-ruffled
which harrier of children
    is frozen still
in his leaning over the head of a child
waiting for those
    tiny, prickly stems of eyebrow
to finally fall back into place

and

I am wondering
why his bed-lone wife
    has not come hurrying through the dimly lit hallway
to see what is
    taking him
so long
again
    tonight

THE REMEMBRANCE

    for Displaced Africans Everywhere

In my blood
    there is the rhythm

beating
    stepping out the steady pace
of the journey
    long remembered in my blood

and I can only think of some gritty, sandaled foot
    black by any measure
patting the sand
beating out the constant flow of stepping
    churning the already beaten and broken grains
further
    into the mist that sand becomes
along