

THE AMISTAD

Spring 2019



T

***he Amistad* is Howard
University's student-run
literary magazine. Our
name honors the rebellion**

**that took place on the Spanish slave ship, La
Amistad, on which 53 captives, Mende people
of Sierra Leone, victoriously rebelled. After
bringing themselves to shore, they sued for
their freedom and won. Since the 1990s,
Howard University students have worked
to honor the rebellion that took place on
L'Amistad.**

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JOHSUA GREEN
SONG OF THE TRO TRO #1 ((GHANAIAAN SUN
PLAYS THEDOZENS WITH AMERICAN BOY)

ALEXIS WHITE
THREE ART PIECES THAT I DO NOT KNOW
THAT NAME OF

Beauty stores are a trip.

‘Til I was 12 I suffered from summer-sun-shy.
Hissed like it hurt to be browned burned
Wonder Bread white turned
“So Black you’re blue”
as the chlorine in the pool water that
made the Black Blacker.
I’d also sacrificed swimming.

I think that’s why the girls who shield
themselves

[ON SKIN]

Breeze

with umbrellas, meant for rain,
during dry season can't meet my eyes
when we pass each other on campus.
Maybe they fear I'll ask to borrow it
and they've no spare.

Perhaps it's my questioning glare.
I bet they've given up swimming now

“Do you know Kali?”

“The Blue goddess? Yes.”

“Well she's not really blue, she's Black”

Oh, the driest wet wonder
drawn into our heads by nature
The soft ripple frozen on the top of our skulls
Let it be ritual
to tame our hair at its roots
to turn curl into waterfall -
-a tsunami, seismic and hard in all directions
and let this be my initiation
A soft bristled brush
gripped firmly
like all my niggas' handshakes
The key to any block
pressed underneath my durag
Let it be innocent
The boy getting ready for the high school dance
Muscle memory of the movement
Clean and crisp at the back of the neck
Let no new barbers touch this scalp

Jason B. Crawford

Let no new barbers touch this scarp

Only the ol' G's
The Pops and Docs
Where guards know my head
Like old lovers
and tonic kisses my line up with its teeth
Where the only thing splattered from this head
is the 360 that drips off it
And nobody drowns here
There's a century of boys wading in the water
of these curls
Only taught through the same daily ritual
A palm full of Sportin' Waves
Greased fingers
moving with the tides
Ready to show the guardian of this hood
To prove you are kin here
To show you are one with their sea

Ode to the Waves underneath my Wave Cap

When I wish to leave

Marlin Jenkins

with thanks to Mariama Lockington and Yalie Kamara

I'm still unsure where it is
 instead I'd like to be. I imagine
 as an option a house with chairs
 for the ghosts, the ghosts still massaging
 aches they wished—hoped, knew—
 would leave when they did, ghosts who have
 given up on roaming and grieving
 both. How many hundreds of years
 would it take to get used to not possessing
 your original body? to learn how possession
 of another even in afterlife
 is a matter of agency? I imagine a place
 where grass is just itself and never a lawn,
 where water has space to pool
 without the earth dug into to create one.

Still, with any place I could go
 I still take with me the ones
 I have created, the ones
 created for me—the ones
 made with brick walls, barbed wire.
 If a ghost dies on a border
 who will forget what they died
 for first? If such a place
 exists that is filled with love
 for me—now or after this body—
 where is it? how will my lungs
 and love adapt? do trees
 grow there?—ones that don't
 produce allergens?—ones with arms
 that know to break when adorned
 with roped flesh? is the soil rich
 only from bodies that were ready
 to go?

Crunchy Green Apples

(Or Omo)

Look how the city becomes littered with little location pins marking the places you used to go with her. The crowded park with its broken swings and sunburned seesaws. The swimming pool with the deep end she warned you against. The cinema where she used to sneak in her own snacks because she said she had paid for the ticket and that was that. The long walking routes where she pointed out ugly houses and criticised people with too much money but no style. You tread through town carefully, trying your best not to stumble across a geocache of memories. You shy away from the nursery where she adopted flora to fawn over until it died when the drought came. You steer clear of all the textile shops. No imported Javan wax prints and emotional triggers formed against you shall prosper. You sanitise your life of her presence and for a while it seems to work.

The memories do not respect your borders. They steal

across your lines in the early morning when you pour your cereal into the bowl. They sneak through your fences in the afternoon when you spread the thick layer of peanut butter on your slice of honey and oats bread. They scale your walls in the dead of night when you gargle and floss. You rush to bed quickly, turning off the lights, cocooning yourself in the duvet. You listen to the memories running around your apartment unseen, like mice in a ceiling. They dreaded things ambush you. Like when you do your laundry and recall that soapy smell she had on her hands back when she scrubbed the collars of your school shirts.

“OMO! Itakupatia what you are looking for!”

For some inexplicable reason she liked that commercial from way back in Nairobi. She always muttered the pay-off line under her breath when she poured the powder into the basin, frothing it with a whisking motion of her hand.

She would say it again when she pegged the clothes to the washing line.

Even the mere sight of golden apples sets you off. She detested them. She said they cheated her of the crunch they were supposed to make when they were bitten. On the sixth page of your third-grade English textbook it stated so quite clearly. The boy with freckles had a speech bubble which corralled his binding edict: “Yum! This apple is crunchy. I love crunchy, green apples.”

It became a by-law in the house that apples which did not crunch were a crime against the dictates of grammar and spelling books. Whenever the crisp Granny Smith apples that shone when they were shined were unavailable in shops orchards in South Africa were considered to be agents of dissent. When you were younger, still young enough to be entertained by your mother’s repetitive jokes, she would come into the

house after doing a bit of pinning and shouting and she had bought some more and your brother would be full of helpfulness and she would run out of the house to the kitchen to unpack her bags and she would reach for the apples and say, “Yum! These are crunchy. We love crunchy green apples!” And you would become excited and giggle. The simple thing amused you back then.

Back then.

Later, when the world grew older, when your horizons broadened and your hair blurred your vision when you became a member of a tribe called the world, you did not play alone. You announced triumphantly that she had bought more. “It isn’t that funny,” you said as you went to the kitchen and the fridge, scrounging for something to eat. We joke.”

ing her shop-
out that she
e apples. You
er, the avatars
nd kindness,
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o help her
s. As one, you
the apples
These apples
love crunchy,
and then you
entangled in
plest things
k then.

two of you
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and a fuzz of
r upper lips,
ne members
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mpantly
ught apples.
ny, Mamma,”
walked into
opened the
ng for some-
don't like that

“Nonsense,” she replied. “You always liked it when you were young.”

“Maybe.” You shrugged and sipped juice straight from the carton, a habit she had tried to discourage for years. “But we aren't young anymore.”

“You will always be young to me.” She beamed at you. She seemed determined to draw some sort of affection from you.

You made your way to the television room. “We find different things funny now.”

Those tiny scratches you made against her soul when you were starting to flex your claws started popping into your head whenever you thought of her. How many times did you hurt her with your merciless metaphors, your savage similes, your devilish double entendres?

The tally scared you.

What if, you thought one

night as you lay in bed, what if all the bad things we say to people subtract a second or a minute from their total lifespan? What if your tempestuous teenage years put a dent in her health-meter like a fifteen hit combo in Mortal Kombat?

—“If I wanted your opinion I would have looked in the annals of antiquity!”

—“Are you done? Really, now, are you quite done? We're running out of Amazon Forest and you're busy shouting at me like that.”

—“What did you expect, bro? She's old, man. Old people are...excess capacity.”

—“Mamma, Margaret Thatcher wants her jacket back.”

You were flawless victories and fatalities when your words came out to play. The possibility that there was a causal connection between your casual cruelty and her weakening heart muscle,

eroded with every unkindness you lobbed at her, scared you.

What if cruelty kills people?

Nah!

What if—?

NO!

What if...

Maybe.

What if you killed your mother?

You avoided the fruit section in shops, skirting them like a restaurant you used to visit with an ex. When you really had to buy some fresh produce you looked over the apples like they did not exist, like you and them did not go all the way back.

Now here you are in this shop, wheeling a trolley, collecting sustenance and sundries for your place. You do not make enough from teaching to fill your fridge so without think-

Crunchy Green Apples (Or Omo)

ing you slip into a familiar aisle. You tell yourself it is just a matter of time before you sit down and write the Greatest Shit Ever Written. It is all a matter of time before you ascend to bookshelves and Man Booker immortality.

You are right about one thing.

Everything is all a matter of time. The present runs past and becomes the past and loops all the way around and then comes back as the future.

But before this wisdom sinks in thou shalt have plenty of follies. 'Tis the way of things. Everything is a matter of time.

You scan the middle and bottom shelves for things that have been marked down because your money cannot reach all the way up. You spy a can of baked beans and—WHOOSH!—that whirlwind of memories blows down the tin shack of your refuge.

It takes you back to the times she would take you shopping with her, using her rectangle of notebook and her neat, sloping script to beat and bend budgets to her will. She could squeeze mileage out of inches and made a twenty stretch to a hundred. Her grocery list appears, Hamlet-like, and leads you through the aisles of memory which stick with you because you have not given it its last rites:

PASTA

Spaghetti, macaroni, elbows, and screws. Everything else, which was classified as fancy, was called pasta. That is how it went in households like yours; things were generic until there was enough money to be specific. Only at university—and by accident—did you look at the names on the Fattis and Monis packets and realise that tagliatelle and penne were subspecies of the starches you used to heap on your plate. You paused, embarrassed, wondering what other things you did not know about. (Everything that

was not Aromat was called spice. Later, your girlfriend schooled you on the uses of cilantro leaves, marjoram, fennel, juniper berries, caraway seeds, cumin, and saffron.)

RICE

When the living became better she bought a rice cooker and upgraded from plain rice to jasmine and basmati rice, the kind of rice that looked special and delicious on the cooking shows she liked so much. Soft, fluffy, flavourful, not the white mush that was occasionally burned in her steel pot. The rice cooker also brought the envy of the other wives, a currency she tried not to trade in, an inevitable one given the fact everyone was trying to distance themselves from their struggle roots. All the other mothers had the same model within a month.

MAIZE MEAL

She treated pap like it was the plague and kept it out of the house as much as

possible. She missed its texture and its textures. She mourned the cassava connect to leave the court paperwork issues people think stragration laws make safer, protect the and keep crimin actually, they ju rice weaker.

WHITE BREAD

She looked for lo arched, dark bread which stuck out bought from the hood bakery. She first and last sliced them dry and ha then crunched t tea. When she b bread nobody co about anything i it meant money low. Brown bread black mood to th everyone knew leave her alone. even your father time to let her w cooking shows a even if Champio football was on.

missed ugali
of home.
The loss of her
t who had
ntry due to
es. She said
ictor immi-
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e labour pool,
als out but,
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it was best to
Everyone,
r, knew it was
atch as many
as she wanted
ons League

BAKED BEANS IN TOMATO SAUCE

Beans reminded her of the village. It was all they ate with dry potatoes. She had to fight to fist a handful from the pot she shared with her older brothers. She developed strong hands. “Anyone with weak wrists went to bed hungry,” she told you whenever you complained about the monotony of the suppers she prepared. She really, really hated beans, though, and tried to avoid buying them as much as possible. But there were times when the money Houdinied out of your lives and she would have to scoop up the cans in their dozens, putting them in her trolley with poorly disguised shame.

TINNED FRUIT JAM

It dyed slices of bread a gory red when it was mixed fruit. You always hated the gory bits of strawberry that looked like scabs on bread. You did not mind the peach and apricot so much. You are quite sure the jam would glow in the dark from all the colourants and

preservatives in it. She longed for the days when jam came in jars. She said reaching for the top shelf was the next family milestone.

SALT

Cerebos, always. You called it the X-Men salt and she never understood the joke. When you think of it now, that was the precise moment your mother fell from your constant praise and favour. It occurred to you there was another world, a world of mutants and magic that she could not access or understand. Hers was the realm of motherhood, a maternal middle ground you had to traverse to get to the other side and emerge cool, independent, and free of her. Free of her criticising your baggy pants, the paisley bandanas you imported from gangster rap; free of her prohibitions of all things rock; free, most of all, of the five-second delay before she laughed at something you said after eternity slipped itself between your quips. “Mamma,” you replied,

“if you were any slower you would get the joke at your funeral.”

(Fucking hell, kid. In die trappe van vergelyking you were the fucking worst. Maybe you did kill her!)

CORN FLAKES

She bought ProNutro once. But a small serving of the stuff swallowed half a carton of milk so she never bought it again. You all went back to the corn flakes. If the milk ran out you could always use hot water with sugar.

DISHWASHING LIQUID

Sunlight or Ajax—she was never specific. She diluted the green ooze in the bottle to make it last longer. She had the hallmarks of an excellent drug dealer. She knew how to cut the green, leaving just enough kick to deal with the grease. Even to this day you can make the last centimetre of liquid last a whole week if you have to.

Crunchy Green Apples (Or Omo)

BLACK TEA

“Rooibos,” she said, “is not even tea.” Its taste, its aroma, everything was off for her. Five Roses, that thing everyone in your house still calls “normal tea” was the status quo. 100s, tagged, each bag was used twice. Lipton was strictly for guests. (Later, there will be a girl who will try to stunt on you at a restaurant by asking for “Lippiton tee” like it is Louboutin but that is a story for another time.)

MILO

For winter only, made with hot water and an Atacama Desert splash of milk.

OROS

Another one of her great shames. As soon as her tax bracket changed she bought Hall’s granadilla and orange concentrate. Her goal: a fridge full of fresh fruit juices, pulp en alles, unspoiled by the hand of man.

WILSON’S TOFFEES

Just watching your mother

look for new places to hide packets of these treats taught you all you needed to know about the tense relationships prison guards have with prisoners. The guard has to worry about many things: the prisoners’ food, their health, and the ever-present spectre of violence. The guard has to watch all the prisoners. But the prisoners worry about one thing. All they think about every second of every day is the guard. And they all watch him. They know him better than he knows them. They know the length of his strides and the beat of his walk. They know when he arrives with five o’clock shadow he has been hitting the bottle and his wife. Your mother, bless her, did her best to keep the sweets out of your reach. But those ten-cent delights put holes in your teeth and kept dentists drilling.

ROMANY CREAMS

These were strictly for Friday tea. Everyone was given two biscuits. They were savoured and eaten slowly. Fridays

were the best days unless guests came over because then a whole packet had to be sacrificed to the hospitality gods. To this day, it is hard for you not to purchase Romany Creams without worrying that you might have to share it with someone.

ZAM-BUK

The one, the only, The Real Makoya!

PETROLEUM JELLY

Blue Seal, a small tub in her handbag, whipped out with alacrity when she saw an ashy elbow or forehead in need of greasing at church.

DRUM MAGAZINE

She loved Credo Mutwa’s tales and, embarrassingly, all the stories of tokoloshes impregnating women in townships in South Africa.

TOMATOES, ONIONS, AND CARROTS

From the roadside—she made sure to buy each one from a separate woman. She never haggled over the price. She

paid whatever the price was. You asked her about the price and she said, “What are the prices in the shop? What to the manager? What over the price? What not. You just accept the price of an avocado even if you know it is too high. But when people ask for a person selling fruit on the side of the road, they want to do it because they can drive the price up. It is embarrassing to be seen with poor people.”

WASHING POWDER

She bought the Lipton variant, soaking it overnight before washing and twisting it in a mangle until it yielded to the iron. When she bought a mangle machine she wanted to find out how long it could be without spending it beating clothes.

Sometimes, instead of a ma you called her by a nickname stuck to her back. She would never wash

They asked.
About this once
When you see
How do you go
and negotiate
No, you do
except the price
even when
too expensive.
I see a poor
fruit by the
the first thing
I see how low
the price. It
to negotiate
e.”

DER
hand wash
laundry
the wringing
in the bathtub
to her efforts.
nt a washing
is shocked to
ng a Saturday
t having to
t the dirt out of

head of Mam-
er Omo. The
in a way that
sh off. You

and your brother thought it
was funny. To call her by her
labour, to laugh at her efforts.
You called her OMO because
she washed your laundry
when you were young but you
never called her Kindness
when she put plasters on your
knees. You did not call her Pa-
tience when she put up with
you and your anarchical teen-
age-hood. You did not call her
Love when she was around,
the only female presence that
never wavered. Always there
when she was needed, always
around even when you said
she was not. You never called
her all the nice things she was
to you.

No, she was OMO to you.
Labour, and unacknowl-
edged sacrifice, Mamma.
Her passing was like ripping
North from the compass face.
The needle of your life spun
around recklessly looking
for its own purpose, its own
anchor, its own driving force
that was not her and what she
did for you.

Burying her felt like the most

vicious betrayal of biology.
How were you supposed to
deal with the death of the
person who gave life to you?

You have been pushing your
trolley around absentmind-
edly, lost in your recollection.
And then there she is.

OMO!

On the shelves, hand wash,
twin tub, top loader, now with
new micro beads. But still the
same trustworthy OMO you
know from your childhood.
The one that made your
brown shirts crisp and white
again.

Your eyes moisten. Your chest
is crushed by the constriction
of your reminiscence. You
brush off the incident quickly,
embarrassed. You walk away
from her and make a dash for
the till.

You need to escape this shop.

You must escape.

You escape.

Sit in the car.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

Just a trick of memory. Just
your eyes catching the sweats.
Nothing major. This kind of
thing happens all the time to
the weaker species. Give the
Super Negro genes time to
kick in. They will harden the
exterior, put up the Trojan
walls, and relegate this mo-
ment of weakness to the past.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

All better, right?

Right.

OMO! Itakupatia what you are
looking for.

Your ass needs to get
searching.

Tell me how to cherish broken things, so that
I can see their unwavering beauty,
know the pressed secrets tucked
into ripped dungaree jackets,
pushed through tarnished heaps of buffalo nickel buttons,
split among the dusted-filled books

Tell me.
Tell me.
Tell me.

all the way down and across.
There is no end to the missing parts of things:
lost through the years' open-mouthed devouring
like blind eyes blinking against themselves.
The questions continue, strong flickers,
as I wonder about the mystery of what
a conclusion and beginning are worth.

In a Conversation with Alice Walker

Dorsía Smith Silva

Song 0

Yo deodorant is a baaaaad ally.
It stank. With all its good intentions,
doin none of the work
but want all the attention.

Wants every soul, sardined into
this seven passenger van that maxed out
in capacity about eight people ago
to know it's down with the struggle.

Yo sweat just Deebo'd yo armpits.
{WHAT deodorant?!?!}

Yo sweat asked to see a manager.
Said it paid too much money
to be evicted from skin
for no reason other than, "it's hot".

Yo forehead look like moist double-consciousness.
Ole cognitive dissonance head ass.
Veil all salty, soaked, and translucent,
resting hot and sticky against skin.

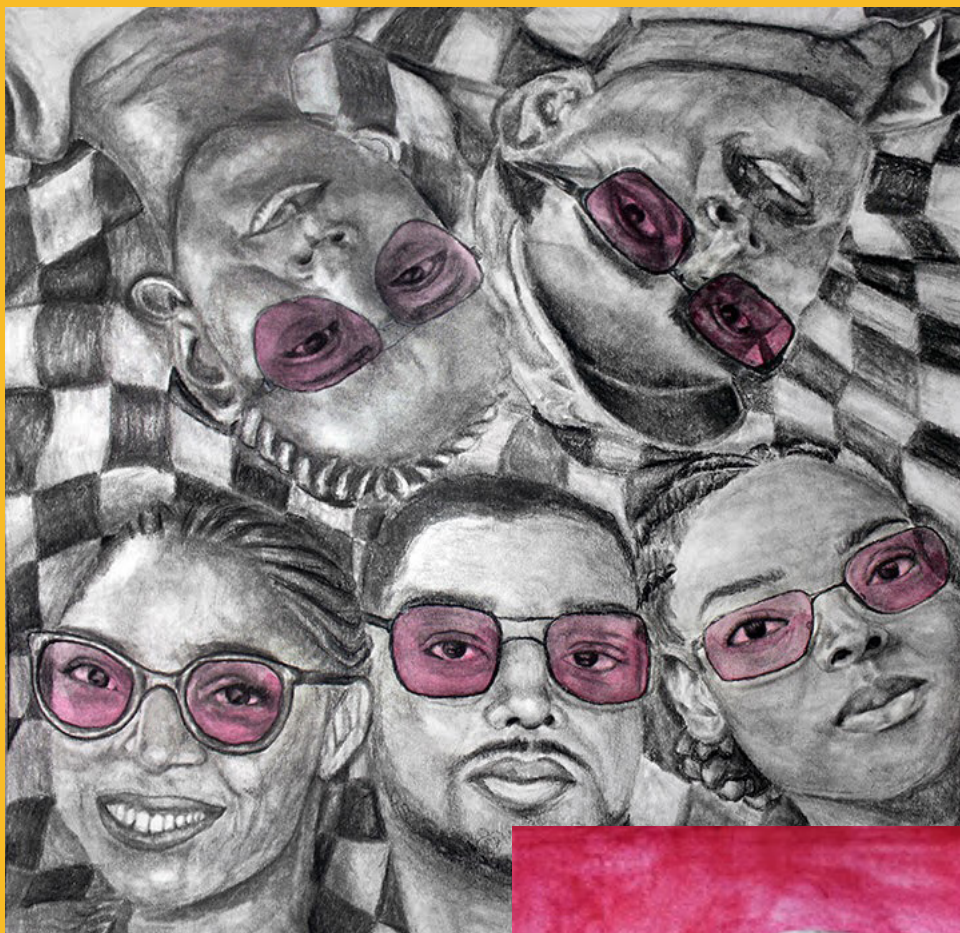
Yo sweat is privilege leaving the body,
and yo shirt is drenched.
The origins of which you also
don't know, but you wear it anyway -

like the skin you couldn't identify
if it called you by name,
but you be ready to fight the fool
who'd dare challenge your ownership of it.

(Ghanaian Sun Dozens with Ar

of the Tro
Tro #1

Plays the
(American Boy)



“Rose colored family”

CHARCOAL AND WATERCOLOR

“Toxic”

CHARCOAL AND WATERCOLOR





“Let go”

CHARCOAL AND
WATERCOLOR



Alexis White