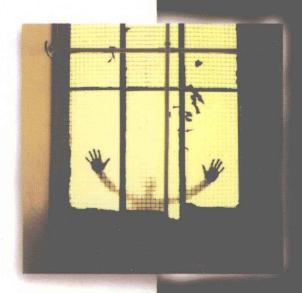
BRUTAL IMAGINATION



P O E M S

RNELIUS EADY

CORNELIUS EADY

BRUTAL IMAGINATION

p o e m s

A MARIAN WOOD BOOK
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Many of the poems in the Running Man section were used as the basis of the text for the jazz-opera Running Man (© 1999, Murray/Eady), that ran from February 16 to March 14, 1999, at the HERE Performing Arts Space in New York City (story and music by Diedre Murray; text by Cornelius Eady; directed by Diane Paulus; produced by Music-Theatre Group; Lyn Austin, producing director; Diane Wondisford, general director). My thanks to all involved with the production, including the fine cast and musicians, and most especially to Diedre and to Diane Paulus.

The quote from Jean Valentine is used with permission of the author, and is from her book *The Cradle of the Real Life* (Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

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Finally, my thanks and love always to my first reader, Sarah Micklem, and to my editor, Marian Wood, the fiercest friend a book ever had.

To Toi, Sarah, Carolyn, and the Cave Canem family

"WELL, BOW-WOW!" -S

Then they let him go. Not wanting him alive, not wanting him dead.

Their knees grind over the sea and make malice. What is love? What does love do?

---JEAN VALENTINE, "BLACK FOR THE PEOPLE"

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The speaker is the young black man Susan Smith claimed kidnapped her children.

HOW I GOT BORN

Though it's common belief That Susan Smith willed me alive At the moment Her babies sank into the lake

When called, I come.

My job is to get things done.

I am piecemeal.

I make my living by taking things.

So now a mother needs me clothed In hand-me-downs And a knit cap.

Whatever.
We arrive, bereaved
On a stranger's step.
Baby, they weep,
Poor child.

MY HEART

Susan Smith has invented me because
Nobody else in town will do what
She needs me to do.
I mean: jump in an idling car
And drive off with two sad and
Frightened kids in the back.
Like a bad lover, she has given me a poisoned heart.
It pounds both our ribs, black, angry, nothing but business.
Since her fear is my blood
And her need part mythical,
Everything she says about me is true.

WHO AM 1?

Who are you, mister? One of the boys asks From the eternal backseat And here is the one good thing: If I am alive, then so, briefly, are they, Two boys returned, three and one, Quiet and scared, bunched together Breathing like small beasts. They can't place me, yet there's Something familiar. Though my skin and sex are different, maybe It's the way I drive Or occasionally glance back With concern, Maybe it's the mixed blessing Someone, perhaps circumstance, Has given us, The secret thrill of hiding, Childish, in plain sight, Seen, but not seen, As if suddenly given the power To move through walls, To know every secret without permission. We roll sleepless through the dark streets, but inside The cab is lit with brutal imagination.

SIGHTINGS

A few nights ago
A man swears he saw me pump gas
With the children
At a convenience store
Like a punchline you get the next day,
Or a kiss in a dream that returns while
You're in the middle of doing
Something else.

I left money in his hand.

Mr. _____ who lives in ____,
South Carolina,
Of average height
And a certain weight
Who may or may not
Believe in any of the
Basic recognized religions,
Saw me move like an angel
In my dusky skin
And knit hat.

Perhaps I looked him in the eye.