

# B R U T A L I M A G I N A T I O N



P O E M S

C O R N E L I U S E A D Y

CORNELIUS EADY

**BRUTAL IMAGINATION**

*p o e m s*

A MARIAN WOOD BOOK

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

**"WELL, BOW-WOW!" —SON HOUSE**

*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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**BRUTAL IMAGINATION:**







*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 I?

*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.