

Duel Coronation

by Nina Yarbrough

WOMAN

Young girl; African American; college aged.

MAN

Young man; African American; college aged.

SETTING/TIME

Coffee house. Evening. Present.

(WOMAN enters and sits in the chair opposite MAN. Removing her bag and coat she sits and sips the drink that MAN has already ordered for her. MAN is reading the newspaper)

WOMAN

Hey. *(SHE removes her bag and jacket, sits in chair opposite MAN sips her drink and takes out a book and begins to read).*

Silence

MAN

Have you read this article?

WOMAN

(Leans in to look at article's title) Can't say as though I have. What's it about?

MAN

Apparently all the Black men on this campus are no good trifling dogs that want nothing more than to crawl between the legs of the next blonde haired, blue eyed bimbo that happens to stroll in off the street. The good ones apparently are *(HE turns the newspaper out and quotes from the article)* "a dying breed whose numbers are diminishing at an alarming rate." Can you believe this bullshit?

Pause

WOMAN

Well...yeah. *(SHE places her cup on the table. Leaning back in the chair and places hands behind head)* I mean not the whole "trifling dog" part but the rest of it, pretty much, I'd say so.

MAN

Are you jokin? Naw, you can't be serious? This piece of shit that they're trying to pass off as news has just demonized the entire Black male student population and you're ok with that?

WOMAN

Oh calm down, it's just an article. *(Takes cup and drinks)* And who says anybody's demonizing anybody? I think somebody's being a little sensitive--

MAN

--Sensitive! No, no, no. I'm not being sensitive. I'm defending myself; there's a difference. *(Short Pause)* I was just attacked, in print! Not only is it saying that I'm a no good down and dirty bastard but that I'd rather date Little Miss Flat Ass over a fine, country fed Sista any chance I could get. Now I'm sorry but that just doesn't sit with me too well.

WOMAN

Where does it say that?

MAN

What? Weren't you listening to me? I just told you they said that I was--

WOMAN

(SHE places her cup on table and leans forward) --Yeah, yeah, yeah you're triflin and a bastard and you love white women. But where does it say "Man is dying out and that you're a trifling lover of white women?" Show me that.

MAN

That's not the point.

WOMAN

Isn't it? Why do Black people always get so worked up whenever they think they've been "offended?" *(SHE stands)* I never quite understood how that works. Somebody makes an opinionated statement and because it's sent out in your general direction or whatever, you think they are talking about you, Man, the individual entity that sits before me? *(Short Pause)* Well, while you mull over that I'm gonna take a quick commercial break.

Exit WOMAN.

MAN

I can't believe her.

(MAN picks up the newspaper again. Re-reads parts of the article again and laughs when HE comes to certain parts)

Enter WOMAN

(WOMAN sits down takes a drink from HER cup places it back on the table. SHE begins to read)

Silence

MAN

I was not being sensitive. I'm just pissed off that they can go on public record as having said such bold faced lies! *(Pause)* But I guess I can't expect sympathy from you of all people.

WOMAN

(SHE lowers book) What is *that* supposed to mean "you of all people?"

MAN

I'm just saying. *(HE folds the newspaper up and places on the coffee table then sits back in his chair)* Everybody knows you're not the most...pro Black, for lack of a better word.

Silence

WOMAN

Explain.

MAN

No, I know what that look means and I am not about to get into this with you. Do you remember the last time you asked me to "explain" myself? You didn't speak to me for a month. *(Pause)* Woman, let's just drop this right now and move on to more polite conversation.

WOMAN

No. I want to understand. *(SHE moves her chair so that is directly facing MAN. HER profile is to the audience)* We've been friends for a long time Man and I've always felt like there was a barrier between us. *(Short Pause)* Now you started this so finish it. How, why, and when have I ever not been *(SHE uses air quotations)* "pro Black." *(Short Pause)* While you're at it, explain your definition of "pro Black."

MAN

Woman why are you trying to start stuff? And you began this not me. *(Stands and crosses to table on the opposite side and looks through magazines)*

WOMAN

(SHE stands and crosses to stand behind MAN) How did I start it? Last time I checked I wasn't the one calling people self-hating deserters!

MAN

Now whose being sensitive. *(Turns to face HER)* I don't believe I mentioned anything about you being a "self-hating deserter." Guilty conscience perhaps? *(Short Pause)* Pardon me my drink's getting cold.

Silence

(For a brief moment they stare each other down, sizing one another up. SHE moves and lets HIM pass)

MAN

Thank you. *(Re-takes his seat and sips his drink. Opens HIS new magazine and reads)*

WOMAN

Guilty conscience my ass. I wanna know what the hell you meant by that.

MAN

Fine. Only on two conditions--

WOMAN

--Name it!

MAN

First of all you have to swear that no matter what is said between the two of us you can not get mad.

WOMAN

Can't do it.

MAN

Why not? I can't be dealing with no angry Black woman the rest of the semester. We have two classes together.

WOMAN

I can't promise that I won't get mad because there's no guarantee that I can keep that promise. Just because I get mad doesn't mean that I'm *mad*.

Long Pause

MAN

Woman, did you just here yourself speak?

WOMAN

You know what I mean. I'm not going to make a promise I can't keep. However, I am going to trust you, as my friend, to be honest and not hurtful in how you choose to explain yourself. I'm a big girl. I can handle whatever you dish out. (*Pause. MAN shuffles around and avoids HER gaze. SHE crosses and resumes HER seat in the chair previously occupied*) Look, how about I promise to try my *best* not to get mad. That's better than nothing. (*Pause*) Come on Man, this is the first for real conversation we've had that didn't involve politics, religion, or our mutual distrust of the FS Lounge mystery meat. I'm not going to drop this--

MAN

--Fine, alright but the second you start clenching your jaw or giving me that look--

WOMAN

--What look? I have no look. There's no look.

MAN

Oh trust me, there's a look. You may not ever see it-probably because it's on your face, but there's a look and I'd like to make it through this conversation without it.

WOMAN

Fine. No imaginary looks. What else.

MAN

Secondly, you have to be honest and truthful in your answers. Swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God.

WOMAN

Done.

MAN

I'm serious Woman. (*Stands and crosses behind WOMAN. Faces audience*) No dodging questions or cleverly crafted answers. If we're going to hash this out then the both of us are going to have to be brutally honest.

WOMAN

(*Turns her chair around and faces MAN*) Yes, yes. I promise to be honest. Now can we move on?

MAN

Are you sure you want to do this? You're not going to like what I have to say.

WOMAN

I should hope not. How are we two ever supposed to have a real dialogue if we constantly like what the other has to say? Now, please explain what you meant when you said I wasn't "pro Black."

MAN

First you have to explain how you could possibly agree with that...that piece of shit that demonized me--excuse me, the Black men on campus.

WOMAN

Fine then. Like I said before I don't agree with everything the article had to say--seeing as how I haven't read the whole thing, how could I? But I do agree with the general point it was making. There are not a lot of descent Black men on this campus; at least not what I would consider descent--

MAN

--And what would you consider descent?

WOMAN

How about a Black man that addresses a young girl by her name instead of her most enticing body part? How about a Black man who has more in his future than just fancy cars, clothes, and jewelry--

MAN

--Are you serious?!

WOMAN

May I continue?

MAN

My apologies, by all means, finish your list.

WOMAN

As I was saying, how about a Black man who doesn't equate self-worth and manhood to the length of his dick size? Shall I continue?

MAN

Oh, please, don't let me stop you. But if you wouldn't mind giving me a few examples to base these claims of yours on.

WOMAN

Alright then... (*Short Pause*) the other day when I was walking to class the girl's volleyball team was going to practice and what do I hear: (*SHE stands and moves toward MAN imitating the cat callers*) "Ah, damn baby! Where you get thighs like dat?" and my personal favorite, "Ah shorty, why don't you give me yo number. When you gone let me hit dat?" Oh and Heaven forbid the young creature being admired should have a backbone and tell the group of dickheads to back up, or fuck off, or just plain old "leave me alone." She gets called everything from "stuck up snobby ass bitch", to "yo ass is ugly anywayz bitch" to just plain old "bitch." Now I don't know about you but that doesn't exactly give me hope for the future of Black on Black lovin if that's the standard that is set for your kind's behavior.

MAN

My kind? (*Pause*) Are you done?

WOMAN

No. However, please (*SHE bows*) go ahead, I insist. (*SHE crosses behind HIM and turns her chair so that it faces MAN dead on. HER profile is to the audience*) Enlighten me as to why I'm not, how did you put it for lack of a better word...yeah, that's right, PRO BLACK.

Pause

MAN

Fine then, if that's how you want to play this game. You, Woman are an Oreo.

WOMAN

I'm a what?

MAN

You heard me. You carry yourself like you're better than everybody else; like you were born into a higher caste than the rest of the brown faces you're forced to look at on a daily basis. I'm sorry to tell you this sweetie but you're Black and no amount of Rancid or Flogging Molly is going to change that.

WOMAN

Fuck you Man! I carry myself like I'm better than everybody else? What kind of bullshit is that? I carry myself like a fuckin lady! Just because you're only used to dealing with little ghetto hoodrats--

MAN

Hoodrats? (*He laughs*) Aw, that's cute, you know the terminology. Did they teach you the secret handshake at boarding school too?

Silence

WOMAN

(*WOMAN stands to face MAN*) So you're going to sit here and tell me that you're basing this entire theory of me not being "Black enough" on the fact that I listen to punk? And because I keep my head up when I walk? Do you know how ridiculous that sounds?

MAN

It's not ridiculous. You always talk about how nobody understands you and how you feel like an outsider. Well sweetheart, sorry to burst your bubble, but no one has gone out of their way to make you feel like anything. There's no great Negro plot to get you Woman.

WOMAN

Nobody said anything about a plot. All I'm saying is you can't use music preference and the way I articulate myself as a basis for your argument. I mean seeing as how you yourself attended at least three concerts of both Rancid and Flogging Molly that I know of.

MAN

That's not the point.

WOMAN

Then what is the point!

MAN

The point is that you and Sistas just like you are the reason why so many NBA ball players are with Little Miss Flat Ass! (*Pause*) That article is just another piece of propagandist bullshit that is only helping to keep young Black men in a current state of despair--

WOMAN

--Aw hell no! I know you are not using that lame ass excuse!

MAN

See, that's exactly what I'm talking about. You're not even listening to me.

WOMAN

I heard you loud and clear. So here's a news flash: Nobody has ever owned your black ass! You ain't never picked nobody's cotton or been nobody's house nigger!

MAN

Will you please listen? (*Long Pause*) I'm not talking about how the "man's keepin a brotha down." I'm speaking about the collective effort, at least it seems like a collective effort to me anyway, to add nothing to the upward movement of young Black men. You say that nobody's ever owned my black ass, true. You say I ain't never picked no cotton, true. You say I have never been anybody's house nigger, this is also true. However, you best believe that by the time I graduate I'll be up to my ass in debt that I can't get financial aid for because they've already met their quota. So, yes somebody owns my ass, but my bonds are no longer made of iron but of red tape and bureaucratic bullshit; the invisible chains of a financial yoke. I may never have picked cotton but flippin burgers and scrubbing toilets at some hole-in-the-wall-fast food place because that's the only place that'll hire your black ass will still give you curvature of the spine as indiscriminately as bending your body to the will of that other cash crop. Except my new overseer won't have the human decency to just flat out tell me he hates me because of my black skin and nappy hair. He will instead hide his hatred behind a daggered smile and doc me a few extra points on my monthly review because of "attitude." And you say that I've never been anybody's house nigger, eh? Well what would you call sitting in a class on the Evolution of Black Stereotypes and only able to count two other sets of brown faces looking back at you? That is why that damn article pisses me off.

Silence

WOMAN

I need some air. (*SHE stands make her way to the door*)

MAN

(*As WOMAN exits*) I knew you couldn't handle it.

WOMAN

(*Stops where SHE is*)What did you say?

MAN

(*Pause*) You heard me. I spoke the truth: brutal and honest just like we agreed and you got mad. But wait, that doesn't mean you're *mad* right?

(WOMAN turns to face MAN)

WOMAN

I guess you haven't been listening to me either. And you wonder why I date white boys.

MAN

You date white boys because you're too afraid to love yourself. If you dated a Black man then you'd have to deal with what you are, or aren't rather.

WOMAN

What am I then?

MAN

A queen that's lost her crown. *(Pause)* Everyday you'd see your brown face reflected back at you in his. *(Pause)* Why do you find comfort in the same arms that held your great-great-grandmother down and forced himself onto her as her husband stood by, unable to intervene? Do you hate us that much? Do you hate yourself that much?

WOMAN

Honestly?

MAN

Nothing less.

(Pause)

WOMAN

The truth.

MAN

The truth.

WOMAN

The truth is that I stopped being your queen the moment you forgot how to walk like a god. *(Pause)* I am not trying to make up for some deficiency. I was-I am rejected--

MAN

--Rejected how?

WOMAN

The moment I grew up into a world where we didn't have to be afraid you tightened your grip on my arm. When I saw that living life and being independent wasn't just a fad that white women created, your fingers dug into my shoulders. When I saw that life could be lived without regret or anger at people that broke us and had a hand in rebuilding us, your grip slipped around my neck. *(Pause)* I became a foreign creature to you and you didn't know how to deal with me so you did the only thing you knew how to do: you bound me and beat my spirit till it festered and bled like great-great granddaddy's did when Masta

first took his love. You were schooled well in the art of subjugation and still I would not waver from your side. As you tried to reinvent yourself and fashion a new identity from the broken remnants that hobbled half dead from the Middle Passage I changed with you. I kept changing and morphing until one day I had an epiphany. Something white women and browner women than I had come to long ago: I am not yours. I belong to God and myself alone. As your mother I nurtured you and taught you as best I could when your daddy wasn't man enough to do what was needed. As your sister I always held you down and had your back because you were my brother and after mama's chastisements, someone had to be there to pat you on the back and reinforce your confidence. As your wife and lover I gave myself to you eternally. We melted into Pangaea beneath satin sheets but then...then you forgot that I was your Queen and not your subject.

MAN

You can't blame us for wanting to stay grounded and true to ourselves.

WOMAN

You're right, I can't. But you asked me why I wrapped myself in his arms. When I knew how to become brand new, your brown eyes, those same eyes that held me in such high esteem just only yesterday, now stared back at me with such fiery hatred I couldn't hold your gaze. His eyes of cool blues and moss greens welcomed my spirit. I will swim forever in those deep blue oceans until yours can see their way back home. *(Pause)* So, I guess this is the way of the Oreo.

MAN

Woman, look I--

WOMAN

--I know. *(Pause)* Are you mad?

MAN

No. If we never talk how can we find our way back? *(Pause)* Are you mad?

WOMAN

Yes. *(Pause)* We should get going, it's almost supper time. Hungry?

(WOMAN gathers her things. MAN gathers his things)

MAN

Yeah, sure. You really should read this article though. *(Pause)* How does Tai sound to you? *(WOMAN turns to face him)* What's the look for?

WOMAN

There is no look! *(SHE pushes him out the door)*

THE END