

David Thomas

HOW MANY TIMES?

...how many times will you accept his apology?...
After he backhands you across the face
Wearing rings with protrusions
And stones of considerable worth.
It has been said that the surface of a diamond
Is so hard that it can actually cut glass.
I guess the flesh around your mouth
Doesn't stand a chance
Against its unleashed fury.
And diamonds are a girl's best friend, huh?
I remember days when we used to go to museums
And frolic in the past.
We used to giggle at how funny Black folk looked
In their garb from the eighteen hundreds.
They were fresh out of slavery
And didn't have much
But they looked so happy.
It must have felt really good to be freed
From an oppressor and physical bondage.
I wonder if anyone could have apologized to them
For the repeated abuses:
The rape, the murder, the torture,
And they'd accept it.
Would they say, "I forgive you" or "I love you?"
Tell me, does love feel the same
When it comes from the end of a fist
As it does from a gentle touch?

Or does it feel any different
When it comes gift-wrapped in bottles
Broken across the back of one's head?
I remember times when we would
Take long walks through Central Park,
Come out on the 110th Street side
And stroll on uptown to Reliable's off Broadway.
Me being the envy
Of every brother crossing our paths.
You being more radiant than the sun
And more beautiful than its setting.
Strawberry flavored lip-gloss
Was your only application,
Partly because it made your "lips shiny,"
But mostly because I loved licking it off.
Maybeline number 21 was good to
Cover bruises.
And a black eye didn't show too much
If you used a darker base before applying color.
What was it that time?
Did it really even matter?
We both knew there was going to be a next time.
And the next time came and went.
Again and again and again
Until love became an infusion
Of vicious assaults, broken bones,
Gashes and stitches,
Surgeries and hospitalizations,
Forced copulation, miscarriages,

And apologies.
I wanted so much to ease your affliction
By cutting out the cancer
That was slowly eating away at your soul
And protect you
From the harm that loved you so much.
From the misogyny
You so willingly accepted
As love and affection.
But your tears and passionate pleas
To spare a life not deserving of such devotion
Would extinguish the fires of fratricide
That burned in my heart.
If only I would have ignored your pleas
Maybe you'd still be here
Stepping in and out of my reality
As opposed to in and out of my dreams
And never having to be apologized to
For wrongs that were actually evils.
Never having to be asked
How many times?
How many times?