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Poems

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Oh life, said the old man
 give me the strength to face you
 for you haven't got the face
 to give me strength.

Alem Mazzabe
 London, England

I Am The Long Distance Runner

I am the long distance runner
 I glide like a gazelle
 Over rocks and rills
 Sprinting through the chill morning dew
 And the darkest nights
 Quick and with a big stride
 To the tune of trot, trot, trot
 That only a runner knows.

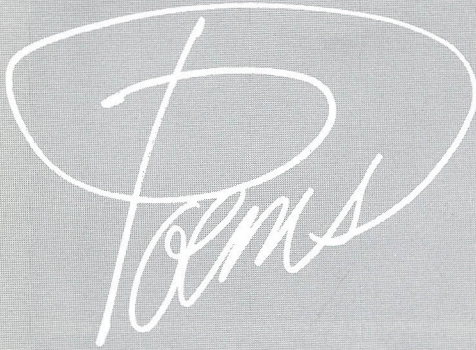
I am the long distance runner
 I sprint through the cold
 Brisk air and my shoulders
 Rumble in their sockets
 But my elbows with
 Tight fists keep them moving
 Cutting through the air
 Swishing away the freezing rain.

I am the long distance runner
 My long legs and feet streak through
 The crisp snow in pitter pats
 Searching for the black asphalt jungle
 Chopping through the tunnels,
 The viaducts, over the bridges
 And canals of my inner thoughts
 To a higher plateau
 That only a runner knows.

I am the long distance runner
 Who runs in the frosty cold
 Of the morning and night
 Shivering my belly off
 But I know as soon as my
 Heart beats like a kettle drum
 In my chest
 I will be hot as the tropics
 At high noon drenched
 In my white T-shirt and shorts.

I am the long distance runner
 Who stampedes his grief into the earth
 As the mind transcends the body
 And clocks in with nature's harmony
 Gliding over trees
 Chirping with birds
 In a world of euphoric madness
 That only a runner knows.

I am the long distance runner
 A familiar sight to motorist
 But a stranger nevertheless to most
 Who is driven and obsessed
 To run day in and day out
 Until the heart swells with excitement
 In the cutting wind
 In the drenching rain
 In the blinding snow
 In the loneliness of being alone



Rally Round

The war continues
 And we must not forget
 How to sharpen our spears.
 To order them like lasers
 To know beyond belief—
 The rebels are still in the fields.

Hear us
 Seeding voices
 Raising resistance songs—
 We did not leave,
 Look into the Truth of Youth and Age
 And see us coming
 In immortal refrain
 We have inherited life
 In the living issue of the People.

The Revolutionaries are here.

We remain
 The sweat of the first morning dew
 Grains of wheat
 Arrows of living gods
 Constant images in the yard
 Confirmations
 Conspiracies of dark old men
 Uprisings
 On the route to revolution
 In the tradition of always readiness
 Rising from ashes and embers
 Siempre, returning to the source/

We are the progeny of the People's cries
 The answer to their anguish
 The function for their futures—
 Oye,
 The high tree says he sees far,
 The walking seed says
 He sees farther
 I tell you
 Behind the mountains
 are mountains growing—
 These are crucial themes to remember
 And this a critical thing to know,
 Iron will cut iron.

Lasana M. Sekou
 Howard University

Running to the tune
That only I hear
And the long distance runner knows.

I am the long distance runner
Who loses no time
But lets fly with a dozen rifles
Firing into my own world
As I leap over frost-bitten grass
Onto the trails of life
Going my rounds in dreams
And whistling with birds
Turning at lanes and corners
Without knowing that I
Streak across brooks, rivers, streams
That only a frost pain suffering runner
knows.

I am the long distance runner
Who knows it's a treat to be
Out under the sun
Without a soul to break
My stride through the cobweb
Of landmark - swishing, swishing along
Slapping my feet in symphony
With my puffing breath
Numb! Everything numb!
But good because
It's numb before coming alive
No numb after being alive
But only the long distance runner
knows.

Janet R. Griffin
Howard University

Down Under

The number and the application of
science
can explain some of it
but to really understand
where Black Americans are today
underemployed
undereducated
and underrepresented
you have to understand the history
of this nation

You have to realize
that a little more than a century ago
we didn't have our freedom
Most would like to forget
that we were slaves
but to do so
leads to a total misunderstanding
of where we are today
down under

You have to realize
that in 1896
inferiority became the law of the land
once again
when the Supreme Court ruled that
Plessy
a black man
really wasn't equal to Ferguson
a white man
And we spent the next six decades
living in the world's most democratic

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nation
New Directions, Vol. 11 [1984], Iss. 1, Art. 11
as fourth class citizens

down under
down under where only a few flowers
managed to grow

In 1954
the Supreme Court redefined equality
and ruled
that our legal inferiority
was really illegal
So once again we were free
but we spent the next ten years
convincing most that there was nothing
to fear

But the fears kept the doors closed
and we were kept down under
down under where only a few flowers
managed to bloom

During the 1960's
they jailed or killed most of our leaders
and most of theirs too
But enough good women and men
survived to see
new laws redefine our rights once again
We got the right not to be denied
the right to vote
the right to hope again
The right to find new light
to shine down under
down under where a few flowers
managed to multiply

So here we are in 1983
free
but still underemployed
undereducated
underrepresented
and down under
Most would like us to think
that we are here because
we are simply inferior
So that numbers and the sciences
attempt to prove inferiority
but the numbers
and the sciences ignore reality
The numbers can't count the
uncountable truth
the historical reality
of how you have kept us down under
down under where only a few flowers
grew
bloomed
and multiplied
(Just think where Black Americans
would be
if the years spent down under
had been spent in the sunlight
where flowers are supposed to grow.)

Joseph A. Hawkins, Jr.
Washington, D.C.

The Survivors

Let the dry grass burn in the wind,
And the sand shift and remold,
And the bleached bones
That once ran free in the wind
Among the thorns,
Lie scattered like disjointed dolls,
Discarded...
No more fear of fang or claw;

Far beneath the burnt-out grass
Wind cool passages...
And furtive life is there,
The unquenchable stream of life, persisting
Since long before articulated limbs
Were first established on the earth,
Surviving burning wind
And changing current and flood,
Waiting, waiting
To emerge, as from bomb shelters;

Let the strong wings circling on the rising
draft
From their cool cliff face
Above the chasm,
Wheel, eyes piercing and probing
For movement on the ground;

Strike on the iron beak!
Rape by the claw!
Again and again...
But there, in the cool tunnels
Life will be renewed,
And the survivors will emerge,
Year after year,
Age after age!

Nathalie V. Cole-Johnson
Monterey, Ca.