

Lula's Green Scarf



Minerva give it to me
this heah green scarf
wrapped 'round my neck
like a pretty necklace.

Minerva tell me to wear it
only when I'm rightin' myself,
only when somethin' come 'long
that puts me in danger, tries

to gobble me up. That happens
quite a lot nowadays to us
women slaves who take matters
into they own hands too often.

We got no "Matters," Massa keep
tellin' us. We's slaves, not even women,
Massa says, 'cause women's foolish,

step outta they place too often,
don't give the devil his due,
strut 'round like they's precious
power from the Lawd, Himself.

At least that's what Massa say.
Missus don't pay him no 'tention,
jes keep charge of things, like
she always do, winkin' at me

from the corner of any room she find
me in. Don't know how I figure in all this,
I'm a woman and I'm a slave, and one seems
to cancel out the other. But Minerva say no!

They be things to stand up for, Be for,
believe for. What things, I say.
Yo'self, Minerva say. Am I a thing? I say,
Minerva don't answer. She jes' give me a hug.

She sold a year ago to some place
in South Carolina, not too far away
from heah. Massa say she too uppidy
to be any good on the plantation.

He likes his property with fences, he say.

Whenever I feel my uppidy, I wears
the scarf, green and woolly and scratchy
at times, remindin' me of Minerva and how
she left it on the supper table for me,

for everybody to see, after she left.
I puts it in my pocket before Massa
ask any questions, and called out to Minerva

in the night, with my eyes watery:
*I got it, Minerva. This heah scarf
be the umbilical cord between you and me,
rough though it be, and the salvation*

*of the good things you learnt me to take
for myself. Minerva, you a generation behind me
and you give me myself. Lawd give you to me in prayer,
maybe to cease the prayer that have no hindsight.*

I thank you, Minerva.

So when Massa sold Minerva,
I wears the scarf.

When Aunt Sarah died,
I wears the scarf.

When Massa beat Missus for bringin'
water to the field hands,
I wears the scarf.

When I hears of Minerva's 'scape
from that plantation in South Carolina,
I wears the scarf.

When I be asked to watch the whuppin'
of 'nother slave,
I wears the scarf.

I keeps it clean and untattered,
puts it under my head at night,
and when the dark be at its brightest,
I reach, and gives it my blessin'.