

## Short-Short Fiction

### Eve Brown *Losing Africa*

*“I want to embrace my inner black woman,” she said. The white woman loosened the kitenge wrapped around her ample waist and sat down. The rest of the women sitting around the circle stared as she kicked off her rubber flip flops, revealing ornate designs hennaed onto her calloused, pink feet. “I thought being part of this group would help me keep my ties to Africa.”*

“What the fuck kind of craziness is this?” Dionne demanded through her teeth. “This is a Women of Color group. You can see that. You, Bwahaha,” she said jabbing her finger, “or whatever you call yourself, cause I know that ain’t the name your mama gave you, you most certainly do not belong here.” The other women sized her up, taking in how the light practically shone right through her skin.

“Bwahinmaa,” the white woman said, making the word roll elegantly off her tongue. “It’s the name I was given in Africa.”

“Africa, my ass!” Dionne stood and took a step toward the woman. “You’re just another white woman looking for culture! And anybody’s culture will do.”

“Now, wait a minute,” Kim interrupted. “Everyone is entitled to self-identify and self-select. No one had the right to tell us whether or not we could come to these meetings. So Bwa ...” she hesitated. “She has the right to decide that she belongs in this group if she wants.”

“Yeah, well, she has the right to decide. But you don’t just decide that you are a woman of color. No, baby. That shit gets decided for you. It was decided for me the day your people dragged my people out of Africa.”

“You don’t know a thing about me or *my people*.”

“Yeah, well, I know color and you ain’t no woman of color.”

Kim held up her hand. “Whoa, let’s all take a deep breath, here.” She looked over at the white woman. “Bwa... *what’s your name?*”

“Bwahinmaa. It means one who has left her community.”

“That’s nice. Is that the name they gave you when you got to Africa?”

“No, they called me *Tubab* for the longest time,” she laughed. “That means white stranger.”

“That shit’s right,” another woman said under her breath.

“Bwahinmaa was the name they gave me when I left Africa.”

“Yeah, that’s real sweet,” Dionne raised her voice. “But we can’t have no lily-white sisters in here. That’s not the point.”

“Just chill, Dionne,” Kim said. “Bwahinmaa, could you give the group some time to discuss this? Why don’t you wait out in the hallway. We’ll come get you in a few minutes.”

She rose gracefully and retied her *kitenge* in one fluid motion, picked up her woven bag and walked out of the room. In the hallway, she felt the heat in her face and collapsed into a chair. She could hear their voices coming from the other side of the door and she hated those women. She hated them: wrapped in *kinte* cloth and knowing nothing about the bony fingers that wove it. Crying for the lost tit of milk and honey yanked from their mouths, but never tasting its bitterness. Certain they'd all be queens right now if only their ancestors had not been dragged to America.

She shook her head and closed her eyes and could see the women of her village. Their black skin matted gray from dust as they coaxed water out of a dry well. Their long, tired breasts flapping dully as they pounded cassava into the tasteless meal that they prepared day after day. She could see them with their babies tied to their backs, babies with scrawny arms and distended bellies. She could see their children, too resigned to shoo the flies out of their eyes, their noses, their ears.

"Ha," she said out loud as she looked at the closed door. "What the hell do you know about Africa?" *I was the one who lived on what we could scratch out of that damn anorexic soil, she thought. I was the one who danced with the children under the full moon. I was the one who keened and wailed when they banged the funeral drums. How dare you judge me!*

How could they possibly know that, like them, she looked for the black faces on the streets, longed for them? And if she stared too long it was only because she was trying to recognize someone familiar.

"I was the one they called 'Mama Aisha,'" she yelled at the door.

They say that babies begin to recognize themselves by looking at those around them. She remembered the day Aisha realized she had a nose because Mama had a nose. She had a mouth because Mama had a mouth. For all the years she lived in that scabby village in Burkina Faso she had not looked in a mirror, and in her mind she looked just like everyone around her. After awhile even her neighbors seemed to forget about her color.

She had once read that the human body constantly regenerates itself—sloughing off old cells and creating new ones every day. So, after four years in Africa, wasn't she part African?

"I was the one who threw in the first handful of dirt on the day we buried my daughter. In Africa," she hissed at the door. "So don't tell me I am not an African woman. I have *lost* more of Africa than you will ever have."

When they opened the door to invite her back in, she was gone.