



**'UMTHANAZO'
-BLACK WOMXN'S
PRAYERS AND THE
RECOLLECTIONS OF
THE EVERYDAY**



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In the introduction to *Reena: And Other Stories*, Paule Marshall writes about the ways in which her writing is primarily inspired by Black womxn's talk. Reflecting on a comment made by a guest lecturer she had invited to Columbia University, a cis-gender male unsurprisingly, Marshall hesitantly agrees that womxn writers better appreciate the ordinary speech of the everyday. This makes for character authenticity because womxn writers are better exposed to the poetics of their mothers' conversations with their friends in the kitchens where most talking often happens. Of course, this sexist comment was met with much deserved criticism, as Marshall notes, as it fixed womxn in the space of the ordinary and domestic, "locked away from the world in the kitchen with only each other to talk to, and their daughters locked in with them".

While rightfully challenging the statement's sexism along with her students, Marshall also leans into the truth of his statement by sharing her own experience of tapping into the Black womxn's conversations she grew up with to inform her characters and the poetics of her writing. Marshall writes: "I grew up among poets. Now they didn't look like poets – whatever that breed is supposed to look like. Nothing about them suggested that poetry was their calling. They were just a group of ordinary housewives and mothers, my mother included, who dressed in a way (shapeless housedresses, dowdy felt hats and long, dark, solemn coats) that made it impossible for me to imagine they had ever been young."

Through this recollection, Marshall troubles the traditional image of the poet as one who "sits in the attic writing verses", has honed a particular set of poetic forms, has published, and has an audience of readers, scholars, and critics. She expands poets to include the womxn whose words rarely make it beyond the moment of conversation, within the context of their exchanges with one another, and only sometimes are penned in letters to relatives. Reading this, I thought of conversations with my partner's grandmother, Jacqueline Hicks, who, during spades games, will share memories that hold some of the ways in which Black people used language to address daily aggressions such as being called in diminutive ways. "My momma nicknamed me, Miss Lady. I would go to different people's houses, knocking on their door. They would say, who is it. I would say, Miss Lady!" She giggles with pride, then repeats, "I would say, Miss Lady" (Hicks 2021). This nickname stood as an insistence of the respect she deserved in the face of a racist environment that belittles Black people by calling them "girl" or "boy". This use of language also refers to a particular history when parents, grandparents, and communal guardians who had endured slavery and the violences of the Jim

Crow era wanted to offer their children the intramural experience of being respected.

Black womxn's talk, conversations, prayers, and recollections are sites of literary inspiration, living and embodied archives that we must uphold more deliberately and intentionally.

These Black womxn, "kitchen poets" as Marshall refers to them, engaged the questions of the day; their gossip and criticism revealed some of the moral standards of their time, their exchanges about what to buy at the market and what they couldn't find traced their lineage back to Haiti or Senegal or Barbados through food. "They also tackled the great issues of the time. They were always, for example, discussing the state of the economy. It was the mid and late 1930s then, and the aftershock of the Depression, with its soup lines and suicides on Wall Street, was still being felt" (Marshall 3). These conversations bring to the surface personal layers to some of the grand narratives of Black history and the way in which they are experienced in the everyday. Granny Jacqueline, for example, in one of our many conversations would go from talking about a basketball trip to sharing about "coming up South".

The one thing that I can remember... in February we would have what they call a Negro History program at the school. I remember momma made me a dress. She stayed up overnight to make me a dress to go to whatever it was at the school. But you know how when you grow older your memory kind of fades out, you still can remember some things and I remember that. We had that program every year. It was something that was just done because the school that I went to was all Black. The grades went from pre-K up until the twelfth grade. And I left, we left Charleston coming to Rockford when I had passed the sixth grade. We came to Rockford, and I went into the seventh grade. I was talking to somebody the other day and I don't remember who it was. They were saying something about riding in a car and I was saying I remember two times I rode in a car.



They were saying something about riding in a car and I was saying I remember two times I rode in a car. . One thanksgiving we went out in the country and my mother had an accident coming back into town and I said the other time I remember being in a car was the day we came to Rockford in 1959. Yea, ya! The car was so crowded we couldn't do nothing but sit and be still. Cause I think there was a trunk on the inside of the car. It was my grandfather's car. It was a two-door. A two-door car so you didn't have a lot of room. I don't know how in the world four adults and five children got in that one car. And I know mamma put a trunk in there! So maybe she put it in the trunk of the car, I don't know what, but my grandfather had come to Charleston, Missouri to get us to bring us back up here (Jacqueline Hicks, 2021).

To extend on Marshall's reading of Black womxn's talk as poetry, Granny Jacqueline's mid-conversation recollections also add to the fact that they are also living and embodied archives who through dialogue, song, prayer, trace their lineage and migrations, and tap into a long range of ancestral memory and a record of experiences that are further layered onto in the present moment. For Granny Jacqueline, the car triggers her internal embodied memory of being transported from the South while moving to the Midwest, which perhaps felt like a definitive shift from one version of anti-Black violence to another more liberal form of the same. We learn of the pride with which Black parents, like her mother, celebrated what was called the "Negro history program," which was instituted by Carter G. Woodson to form part of the teaching curriculum in Black schools. It is now celebrated as Black History Month. Granny Jacqueline's grandfather, who in the story packs the entire family up into his small two-door car is reminiscent of another memory of migration as liberation. In this story, transcribed below, Granny Jacqueline recalls how her grandfather had decades earlier helped her grandmother escape from the plantation:

My grandmother was Haitian. My mother's mother was Haitian. When my mother's mother died, my mother was very very young. Maybe 'bout 15, 16 years old... and... my grandfather left a recording talking about my grandmother and how he got her. Uhm, I don't know if he said he took or stole her from the plantation (laughs coyly) but this was then, this was Mississippi (Jacqueline Hicks 2021).

Granny Jacqueline's connection to a car is replete with memories of significant moments and movements in black life. What this example of a conversation with Granny Jacqueline makes apparent is that these "everyday ordinary" poets are always already

socio-cultural historians, archivists who carry in their speech ancestral memories, stories of migrations and political shifts, linguistic complexities and nuances, food knowledges, and healing intuition that finds its way into literature through authors who serve as conduits and bring these voices onto the pages of their narratives. Their talk, their words and sayings, idioms and images, are a mirror of time and place, realities that seem past and are yet so present. Black womxn writers have recognised this and in their work live the rituals, experiences, and languages of these womxn. Their words and memories find their way to the page in the mouths of characters who might and might not resemble them. Theirs is the ghostly presence that offers the timbre to the language of narratives and deepens the quality of voice of the most well-known characters.

Julie Nxadi's poem *Umthandazo* evinces this practice by drawing on the prayers of Black South African womxn. This paper is inspired in part by Marshall's insights on how these womxn inform her writing and by my encounter with Nxadi's visual poem, *Umthandazo* (2019), at an event at the Centre for African Studies at University of Cape Town. I use "encountered" to deliberately point to the visceral experience of being confronted with the memory of my grandmothers in the space. From Nxadi's opening call for God's attention, "Ngweletshetshe," speaking an isiXhosa name for God that precedes the colonially adopted and more commonly used name, Thixo, her voice and the slow unhindered pace of her pause, I was brought face to face with my grandmother, uRadi and my great-grandmother, uNongoyi. My body responded to the embodied knowing of how to show up when my grandmothers pray. I slowly slid off my chair into kneeling. Quietly rocking side to side, head bowed, hands on thighs. I was back in my grandmother's living room, her bedroom, her kitchen, walking to and from church, with her at the grocery store when the money she's holding might not be enough and she would clasp my hand, slow tapping it while she murmurs a prayer under her breath, in front of the TV watching the news that often led her into urgently pleading with God: "Oh yhini Simakade, singabantwana bakho. Sincede. Usilibele na?" (Oh, why God, we are your children. Help us. Have you forgotten us here?).

Prayer has been the language in my family for taking stock of the day, to "hold vigil" with the *living*, to bear witness, to share memory and pass on wisdom, to call God into account, to speak the word, to tend to the experience of being Black in the world.

Black womxn's prayers practise the kind of vigilance Christina Sharpe invites in *In the Wake*. Sharpe asks: "What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death? It means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living" (10). These prayers are not so much meditations with light as they are "walks in the valley of the shadows" of Black death and dying. They are the labour of hope in process, they take care to record the violence of the day and demand God to show up for a better tomorrow. They demand the bones to gather and walk, mathambo hlanganani. It was during these prayers in which my grandmothers required of God something much more than government interventions, rations, petty allowances, and symbolic changes. They understood that the condition of their suffering was not part of some divine plan but a form of violence that they demanded God strip from the root and give them the strength to care for their children and each other another day.

In this paper, I bring my maternal grandmothers' prayers, Radi Haarhoff (by way of remembrance interspersed throughout) and Nongoyi Haarhoff by way of her great-grandchild, Asanda Salman (later in the paper), onto the page alongside Nxadi's *Umthandazo*. I also include the recollections of my partner's grandmothers, Jacqueline Hicks (above) and Dorothy Hill (in closing) who often in conversations share memories of their upbringing in the US South and Midwest. Their ruminations often take the form of storytelling, song, prayer, and tracing lineage. By existing on the page together, I celebrate these womxn's prayers and recollections as literature, as poems, as stories, as living and embodied archives.

Below, I offer a transcription of the poem, carrying it from its visual and sonic landscape onto the page, in the same way that I am bringing my grandmother's voices and their recollections onto the page from recording of our conversations.

Julie Nxadi's *Umthandazo*¹

Ngweletshetshe
(Almighty)

Wakhomba umhlaba ngamatha elanga asikayo
(are you going to point the rays of the sun at
us haphazardly)

Usasibona na?

(Do you not see us?)

Akungebi usilibele eziko, Mpheki?

Have you not forgotten us on the stovetop,

Chef?

Wasiphonononga amandla wathi uyasiqinisa
(You test out strength saying you are making
us stronger)

Wasithwalisa amazinki kwisitshingitshane

wathi uyasomeleza

(You make us carry sheets of corrugated zinc
in a tornado saying you are making us tough)

Isenguwe na Nkosi?

(Is it still you, Lord?)

Nto zimbini

(It's one of two things)

Awuzivanga ukuphumela kwakho entlontini

(...either you did not feel yourself crossing
over into bullying)

Okanye wemka k'dala wasishiya sizizisulu

zemimoya engendawo

(Or you left us a long time ago at the mercy of
all ungodly spirits)

Sixolwa amehlo ngamaxalanga, Nkosi

(Our eyes are being pecked by scavengers,

King)sibola inyama (Our flesh is rotting)

Sigqabhuka inyongo phezu kwebedi zethu

(Our gall bladders are exploding on our beds)

Kumagumbi ethu

(In our rooms)

Ezindlini zethu

(In our homes)

Wanqaba Nkosi?

(And this is when you choose to be scarce,

King?)

Usalazi isango lelilizwe ukuthi lijongise ngaphi

naa? (Do you still know the door to this

house?)

Kuhlokoma isinyama (storm clouds roll in

carrying curses)

kudilika indoonga (the walls of Jericho are

falling)

andikutyholi Yehova, ndiya yaleza (I am not

accusing you, Lord. I'm just telling you what's

happening)

Umtiyoli uvale ngomqolo emnyango (The Devil

is standing at the door emboldened by your

absence)

iintsana zibukele ngapha kwakhe (Our

children are watching between his legs)

¹ Soon to be published as part of Nxadi's book collection, *Ebubini*.



Zibukele intsaana' mTrinithi (Our children are watching, Holy Trinity)
 naxa siwelwa zinyama sishiyeka
 singamathambo (watching our skins rot, our bones exposed)
 Awazula ngobusuku (wandering the streets at night)
 Akhonye (screaming)
 Akhale (crying)
 Esoyiswa yilento' kuthiwa bobubomi (ghosts of our former selves)
 O, Yehova wasithela? (and you still hide, Lord?)

Nkosi, (Sovereign)
 Wasizimela? (Have you forsaken us?)

Buthe uyasiqinisa, Bawo (You said you were making us strong)
 sithi aba (here we are)

Sigqekeke inyeke, amehlo asinawo (Our mouths are cracked, our eyes gorged out)

Sopha inyawo, Nkosi sinezivubeko (Our feet are bleeding, Lord. We have scars.)

Asikhomsulwa (We are not without sin)
 Kuninzi esikwenzileyo egameni lokuqina
 (There are many things we have done in the name of being strong)
 Sithi aba (This is us)
 Sibabi (We are ugly)

Kodwa xasinokonyanywa nguwe, Bawo (But if we disgust you who made us, Father)
 sojongwa ngubani naa? (Then who will look at us?)

Titled *Umthandazo*, which translates into *The Prayer*, Nxadi makes evident the fact of Black womxn's prayers as poetry. Like Toni Morrison in *Beloved* or Toni Cade Bambara in *The Salt Eaters*, Nxadi draws on the grammar of Black womxn's spirituality in the form of prayer and their use of idioms, figures of speech, and their citational practice of calling God to account for what is written in the Bible and their manner of standing as witness to Black experiences. In her paper, "Palimpsests of Ancestral Memories: Black Womxn's Collective Identity Development in Short Stories by Edwidge Danticat and Dionne Brand," Sakia Fürsts writes: "While palimpsests are usually thought of as documents and texts, I argue that human bodies can also serve as palimpsests, especially considering the 'inhabitation' of ghosts or, rather, ghostly ancestral memories in the form of dreams in the bodies of the protagonists. These spectral memories, once remembered and (re)experienced by

the narrators, cannot be removed or separated from their respective psyches (68)." Nxadi's poem exists as a kind of palimpsest haunted by multiple layers of voices, images, and words. Prayer, at least in the tradition of womxn in Black communities, is inherently ghostly, layered, and citational. It is memory and remembering, holding multiple intergenerational experiences of an ever-unfolding past, present, and future co-imagining.

In her poem, Nxadi voices the ugly realities endured by Black people in a world that feels like God has long abandoned them. I first experienced Nxadi's poem as a short film by Akuol De Mabior titled *Fall into the Sky*. The film opens with a blank sheet of fabric on the screen that alludes to an ancient papyrus Bible that is open but without text. Through this opening image, Nxadi layers the blank biblical text which conveys an emptiness of God's word and thus promises, with the thin transparent curtain that speaks to vulnerability and exposure, and the burglar guards bringing attention to a need for safety as well as the immediacy of violence. This image is further added onto by the opening lines that expose God as both the one causing suffering, "Wakhomba umhlaba ngamatha elanga asikayo," and the one who can alleviate it but has neglected to "Usasibona na?"

After a brief blackout, the film cuts to an image of Nxadi's silhouette in front of the window, her back slightly bent over, a single braid swaying back and forth, meditatively, her hands rise to wash over her face in surrender, in the manner I have witnessed my grandmother when she is overwhelmed with the troubles of the world. The use of shadows and silhouettes gives the films a ghostly presence. We see Nxadi walking slowly down a marginally lit street which seamlessly turns into the dark interiors of her apartment. The dark shadows and silhouettes in the street read like the passage in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death." Interspersed with Nxadi's intense, direct look into the camera, her confident, undeterred gait and sometimes enlarged silhouetted figure completes that verse: "I will fear no evil." The poem articulates suffering, neglect, and humiliation. Images of carrying one's home on one's head and the crisis of displacement and poverty, "Wasithwalisa amazinki kwishingitshane wathi uyasomeleza." Nxadi questions the notion of strength and the humiliation of resilience, "Buthe uyasiqinisa, Bawo, sithi aba." She speaks to how the terror is passed on from generation to generation, children watching, learning early of the poverty and neglect they will inherit, "Zibukele intsaana' mTrinithi naxa siwelwa zinyama sishiyeka singamathambo."

As with my grandmother's prayers, I understood that the suffering I saw around me was due to a system of violence on which God is choosing to turn a blind eye, "O, Yehova wasithela?" Or as my grandmother would put it, "O Mdali, wasifulathela."

Nxadi's poem is inhabited by the ghostly presence of Black deathliness. Nxadi's words spare nothing, her words express the brutalities of being mutilated in spirit and in flesh. She asks, as many Black womxn before, alongside, and within her have: "Isenguwe na Nkosi? (Is it still you, Lord?) Is it you allowing this? My grandmother for example would say: "Wathula abantwana bakho bephalala, njani Yehova?" (You go silent as your children turn to dust, how do you allow this, God?)" This manner of questioning God is present even in my cousin Salman's prayer, who still celebrates that she learned what the work of praying is from our great-grandmother, uNongoyi. Salman, my older cousin who was raised by my great-grandmother and steeped in imibedesho yamaWesile (the John Wesleyan Church) as a young guildler, opens her prayer with the same sense of despair and demand for God to come out of hiding and show up for a people who feel long neglected:

**Asanda Salman's Naba Abantwana Bakho
Thixo wamading' amahle**

Sowubekaphina Thixo
(Where will we go, God)
Xa singena'wbeka kuwe?
(If we cannot come to you?)
Sowuncedwa ngubani naa, xa singena'ncedwa
nguwe?
(From whom will our help come from if not
from you)
Wadala thina bantu wenza into zonke
(You created us humans and made all things)

Wamisinkululo Thixo wethu ngalentla, Mesiya
Olungileyo
(You established our freedom today, O God
who is merciful and kind)
Ndizama ukushukumisa umqokumbelo
wengubo yakho
(I'm here to move the hem of your garment)
Ngalentlwa, Thixo, Mesiya Olungileyo
(This evening, God, good Saviour)
Ngalentla, Thixo wamadinga' mahle
(On this day, God provider of good things)
Ndizama lonto, Thixo wamading' amahle
(I am attempting that, God provider of good
things)

Ndizamuk 'sondela kuwe Thixo wethu
(I beseech you, our God)

Ndizamuk 'sondela kuwe, Thixo wamading'
amahle
(I beseech you, God provider of good things)
Nabantwana bakho, Nkosi yethu
(I bring your children before you, our King)
Ndizamuk 'sondela kuwe, neengxwelerha
zeCovid 19, Thixo wethu
(I come before you with those who are
diagnosed with Covid 19, our God)

Ndizamuk 'sondela kuwe, Mesiya Olungileyo,
neenkedama zeCovid 19
(I come before you, good Saviour, with
those who've been orphaned as a result of
Covid 19)
Ndizamuk 'sondela kuwe, nabahlwelokazi
ngengxayayo leCovid 19, Thixo
wamadinga'mahle
(I come before you, with those who've been
widowed as a result of Covid 19)
Ndizamuk 'sondela kuwe, nabahlolo, Thixo
wethu, ngenxayale Covid-19
(I come before you, with widowers as a result
of Covid 19)

Xa kubonakala isifo esingubhubhane
esisthand'uqatsela
(When it seems that this deadly disease takes
our lives to be a thing to play with)
Ndizam' ukshukumisa umqokumbelo, Thixo
wamading' amahle, wengubo yakho, Thixo
wethu
(I come to move the hem, God who provides
good things, of your garment)
Uyazi ukuba Thixo ngalomzuzu kukho
abantwana bakho abasesibedlele begula yile
Covid, Mesiya onemfesane
(Are you even aware that right now little
children are in hospital sick with this Covid,
merciful Saviour?)
Ngalomzuzu ndithetha nawe, Thixo odume
ngenceba kukho abacinyw' amehlo, Mesiya
Olungileyo
(Right this moment that I am talking to you,
God who is known for mercy, there are
children whose eyes are being shut never to
be opened again, good Saviour)
Kubonakale kuphel' ithemba, Thixo wamadinga
amahle
(All hope seems to disappear, God who
provides good things)
Kubonakala kubuhlungu emizini, Thixo,
iintsapho zijongene ngamehlo zixakekile
(Pain sets into homes, God, and families turn
to each other with uncertain eyes)
Thixo wamading' amahle
(God, provider of good things)



Kukho ifemeli ezingayazi kwa imali
yomngcwabo izophumaphi, Thixo wethu
(There are families that do not even now
where the money for the funeral will come
from, our Father)

Xa ndisondele kuwe ndithi ngenelela kaloku,
Somandla
(As I call on you, I am asking that you
intervene, as you ought to God)
Ubon' icebo nanjengoThixo, Mesiya Olungileyo
(Make a plan as God, good Saviour)
Ngena kuleyomizi abantwana abangenanto
kuyo
(Enter into those homes where children have
nothing)
Naleyomizi kungekho insurance khona
(And those homes where there is no funeral
insurance)
Nalapho Thixo ekusandongena khona
i-call abantwana bexelelwa uMama noTata
banishiyile, Thixo
(Enter there where a call just came in to tell
the children that their parents have died)
Abayazi nokuba baqale ngaphi
(They don't even know where to begin)
Ngena kuloo makhaya Thixo wethu
(Enter those homes then, God)

Themba limbi asinalo, esinobamba lona
(We have no other hope to hold onto)
Nqaba yimbi asinayo, esinongena kuyo
(We have no other rock to stand upon)
Ngena Thixo wethu kwimizi yethu sisayolala
(Enter into our homes as we prepare to sleep)
Ngoba kuthi kofika ukuhlwa, Thixo olungileyo

Athi umenzi wobubi, Thixo wamading' amahle,
Agushuze, Thixo wamading' amahle,
acing' azakwenza, Mesiya odumileyo
Kodwa wena Thixo xasivuk'kseni
usinikamandla amatsha
Sicel'usiphe amandla okubiza igama lakho
Khawusiphe lomandla ukuba singayekeleli
endleleni, Thixo wethu

Tyanda lomathumba aqaqambayo ngalomzuzu,
Thixo wamadinga'mahle
Ngena kulomanxeba avulekileyo, Mesiya
oyingcwele, angasayokuvaleka
Ngenelela Thixo
Uthe sibize igama lakho ngemini
yembandezelo
Wena usihlangule, sikuzotise, Mesiya
wokulunga

Khawubonakale nakulen 'imbandezelo esikuyo
Thixo,

Uthi masibekephi naThixo
Kudala sikhala kuwe
Suvalindlebe kaloku, Mesiya olungileyo
Ngoba ithi iBhayihile, indlebe yakho
ayincincanga ukuba ingevi, Thixo'nenceba
Lithi'zwi ingalo yakho ayibufutshananga ukuba
ingafiki, Mesiya olungileyo

Kawusincede kaloku, Thixo
(Help us, as you should, God)
Sikhusele kaloku, Thixo
(Protect us, as you should, God)

Inqaba yethu nguwe, Thixo
(You are our rock, God)
Amandla ethu akuwe, Mesiya
(You are our strength, Saviour)
Sicela usithuthuzele sisayo lala ngobusuku,
Thixo wethu
(Comfort us as we go to sleep, our Father)

Esakho isandla sinenceba nemfesane
(Your hand is full of mercy and generosity)
Sizek'kade umsindo, Thixo wamading' amahle
(Slow to anger, God provider of good things)
Xa sisiza kuwe Thixo, khawuvule ingalo zakho
(When we come to your hand, our God,
please open your arms to us)
Kuze xa sisiza kuwe sizo feelisha iwarmth
yakho, Bawo
(So that when we come to you we feel your
warmth, our God)

Sembathise sonke ngengubo yakho yothando
(Cover us with your blanket of love)
Inguboyomusa nokuthula
(Your blanket of mercy and peace)
Usinike ubunye
(Give us unity)

Wena usithembisile ukuba sozewasilahla
(You promised to never forsake us)
Wena unguThixo ongamshiyiyo umntu wakhe
(You, God who never leaves your own)
Wena unguThixo ozigcinayo izithembiso zakhe
(God, keeper of your promises)

Salman's prayer centres on the impact of Covid-19 on Black families and children. She narrates the various effects of Covid on families and the destitution in its wake. In both Nxadi and Salman's prayers is the central outcry: "Surely you cannot be watching this suffering happen and remain silent."

Both poems name the shadow of darkness that hangs over some of the most oppressed communities and approach God in sovereign terms, using names that reference the goodness and mercy of God when in the same breath speaking of the violent conditions endured by the people God created.

I offer as benediction the song Granny Dorothy closed out our recent conversation with. I was congratulating her on being awarded Best Business of the year for her boutique store in Downtown Rockford. She thanked me and said: "You know it's been a long journey. One thing I've learned being a Black businesswoman is that you have to stay the path. Remain steadfast. You face many challenges including the fact that men are jealous and don't like a woman in business. You've got to do what you need for yourself, though to fulfil what God has out in you. I'm tired baby, I've got to get up early tomorrow morning" (Dorothy Hill 2021). Well in her seventies, Granny Dorothy continues as a bastion of Black womxn's resistance to the patriarchal order. This moment of celebration comes with joy and a recognition of the undue constraints placed on Black womxn as a way to dissuade them from pursuing anything outside of submission to the heterosexual status quo. As she makes her way to get off the phone, she pulls out of herself an old gospel spiritual which grounds her within the lineage of other womxn who've taken up this song to keep going and arrive us here:

Dorothy Precious Lord

Precious Lord, take my hand

Lead me on

Let me stand

I am tired

I am weak...

Her slow, steady, deep and grounded voice echoed the guttural sound of the gospel music of the South and the blues. "I used to sing in my days. My mother took me to church as a child and I joined the choir. I have a pretty decent voice but now it's gone its own way." She laughs, and we say good night. Black womxn's talk, conversations, prayers, and recollections are sites of literary inspiration, living and embodied archives that we must uphold more deliberately and intentionally.

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