

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lynne Thompson: Three Poems

Lynne Thompson · Monday, April 27th, 2026

Instructions To The Nephew Who Wants To Be the Family's Next Griot

1. Beware the secret-filled caskets you will inherit because
2. if you can't handle harassment when asked to spill those secrets,
quit right now.
3. From time to time, you'll have to twist and weave stories to save someone from
embarrassment. (Never tell which version is cornrow; which, dreadlock.)
3a. Forget whether this braiding was served at Thanksgiving dinner or donated
by your predecessors dancing on a second line at Mardi Gras.
4. You'll have to earn the family's trust. No one tell you how.
5. Your home will resemble Middle Earth where there are nothing but bones
for company while you
6. are required to reimagine centuries of stories behind you; ahead, banshees
in the shape of wraiths.
7. You must pretend to know the latest tunes when you just want to listen
to Miles Caton's—*Travelin'*—but...
8. actively avoid over-listening.
8a. That's not exactly true—*never* avoid over-listening...
9. Listen for nuance, for *duende*. (It's harder than it looks unless you value
metaphor, allegory, bruise.)
10. Be eager to act as consoler-in-chief, perspective-provider, lawyer, priest,
relative-most-randy.
11. Be ready to assist with problems and keep Kleenex at the ready. (When
the scandal comes out, someone will hate you for helping or hiding it).
12. Save your money; there is **no** pay and the benefits are imprecise.
13. Did I tell you I won't be the one to select the next griot? You'll have to fight
the imposters who think *they* should be the next keepers of the myths because
becoming griot isn't a birthright and
14. family members will tell you *you don't know enough*—
15. Nobody knows enough.
16. Read everything you can. Ponder Africa's Kingdom of Punt.
.....
d. You can try to take that vertigo-inducing vacation to (place your mixed-race

heritage here), but you will never get close enough so
 17. trust your instincts. Sip each turkey's broth & blood in the bowl of a fungible spoon...

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Nina's Abracadabra

for Shonda Buchanan

She a sea-line woman—Mississippi
 Goddam, see?— and she meant every word
 `cause she knew how to put a spell on us.

She sometime sang it slow or she didn't
 and, either way, she put her spell on us.

Her light come shinin' and she took like a woman.

Even when the dragonflies stuttered the skies,
 even as the winds gathered and the sun went to rot,
 even when it seemed it was the end of the line,
 she put her spell on us.

She an Obeah woman if you didn't know about love
 and yeah, she had a spell for that too.

She was Power while Black.
 She was Rebel with Cause.
 One day she sounded gravel, the next coffee and cream.
 She said music comes second behind the sea
 and she promised to leave us gone to pieces.

While she was drinking her liquor
 and sometimes bringing us down,
 she'd leave her magical mystical in our throats.

Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, Peaches, Keeper
 of the flame and witchery and hex and hex and hex.

Young, til she wasn't, but ever-gifted and always black,
 she put her spell on us and we will always know her
 as angel of our mourning, as that sea-line woman.

*

Traveler

after Diane Seuss

Memory is not Memory only.
 The last time I saw Memory, it was on its way to Mauritius.

Memory doesn't need me.
Every day, my Memory is a Jill-In-The-Box.
On special days, my Memory swims in the buff.
Shakespeare said *'tis in my memory lock'd*.
Kurt Cobain said *drugs will destroy your memory*.
Either way, take the twenty-four off, Memory.
Is Memory ever just black and white?
Next time Memory asks you, give in.
Eventually, all memories will be sold at auction
Despite that sale, my Memory will sing *Good Morning, Heartache* but
before that sale, my Memory will wear a bright costume to the green grocer.
O Memory, I want you green!

(Featured image from Pexels)

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