Sex Talks to Girls

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My first time with Mars on the Rock:

We followed dried spots of blood down the hall in our Kente prints—Mars in a dashiki and I in African pants and black shirt. Her mother had just turned sixty and we’d been invited to her party. We looked amazing.

D. J. met us at the door and hugged me many times. He said he loved sculpture (Mars had told him she’d begun to carve wood), that sculpture was dialectic. He repeated the word with such authority I believed him. Later I wrote in my diary that the ocean seemed to carry away the rules. Ocean Village is a whole world, I wrote.

Sonny, Belle’s man of many years and the father of her four youngest, showed me pictures of his children with his white wife. Belle didn’t seem to mind. They’ll be here later, she said to me over her own kids’ heads.

Then she called me into the kitchen to get to know me and showed me the food she’d been up most of the night preparing. For
your own party? I asked. I felt bad that we hadn’t thought to bring food. Sweetheart, if I don’t, who will? she said, but she didn’t seem to mind about that either. There was a cloved ham, macaroni and cheese, potato salad, collards, and classic fried chicken. Oh, and pig’s feet, which Belle wanted me to try.

(Sorry, Belle.)

I did take a spoonful of the gravy the feet floated in, however, and it was delicious. I think I may have managed a tiny bite of something Mars said was ear not foot.

I was the first girlfriend Mars ever brought home that Belle liked. Mars’s sisters’ kids were hanging on both of us. Doogie fell asleep with his head in my lap. It was so hot his sweat soaked my leg. He smelled little and old at the same time.

Mars braided her nieces’ hair. They sat before her, aged five and six, like sphinxes. Their heads bobbed with the force of her hands. Tender-headed, Mars called them, although neither complained.

She took me to meet her younger brothers in another room. Robert could drink a Beck’s in less than thirteen seconds. He did this twice to show me. Cal was a poet. He wrote rhymed lyrics that sent chills down my arms. He wrote them out like long prose poems, but he knew them by heart, and he could make up stuff off the top of his head (an early freestyler), sometimes with a beat from his boom box, sometimes with just the beat in his mind. I loved Cal. His lyrics filled my mouth. Mars said, He’ll either be dead or famous soon.

D. J. heard her and laughed. She smacked him playfully. The ocean surrounded us on all sides.