

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9748

Letter to Young Sisters and other poems by Nancy Dupree



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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9748

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**Letter to Young Sisters
and other poems by Nancy Dupree**

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9748

LETTER TO YOUNG SISTERS

and other poems by NANCY DUPREE

BIOGRAPHY:

NANCY LORRAINE DUPREE

She's a southerner who did her growing up in Sumter, South Carolina. She graduated three times: from Lincoln High School in Sumter, from Virginia State College in Petersburg, and from Mills College in Oakland, California.

These three graduations convinced her that she was qualified to announce to the world, "Get ready, 'cause here I come!" She came and found out that the world was truly ready...had been ready for a LONG time...and the wrestling match was on. Wrestling with money, marriage, motherhood, divorce; wrestling with reality...wrestling with life. She looks back and wonders how she survived because she knows now that she was not EVEN ready.

What she has to show for it all is her own personal individual sanity, a child most precious to her, a few worldly possessions, and some poems. You are invited to take the poems, fold them neatly, and tuck them away in the corner of your soul reserved for food.

SELF-PRAISE by Nancy Dupree

I'm so glad
that
what I see in my mirror
is
a woman.
And I have sweet reasons for feeling that way.

For instance,
I love the way it looks.

A woman's mirror
gives an image

of flesh
that
blossoms and hides
and
moves in semi-circles.

Now
maybe she just finished baking a cake
or
driving taxi
or
getting elected to city council...

WHATEVER!!!

Her mirror is always
an image
of flesh
that
blossoms and hides
and
moves in semi-circles.

And a woman's mirror *sounds* good, if you know how to listen.
You have to

listen to the eyes....her secrets are in her eyes.

So...if you want to really know her,
you must listen to her eyes.

And a woman's mirror *feels* good.

It feels so...necessary.

It feelsrich

It feels

like

among other reasons,

I was created to magnetize,
tantalize,
passionize
my
MAN!

So yeah...

I'm glad

that

what I see in my mirror is a woman.

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TEARS by Nancy Dupree

next thing I knew I

was

weeping

not crying

(crying is for wedding and funerals and such)

I

was

weeping

so hard I wanted to scream.....not holler

(hollering

is

for

when you're gettin your tooth pulled)

I needed to scream

couldn't.....you know why

it would have been

"Mommy! MOMMY!!

What's WRONG, Mommy?"

so I couldn't scream

couldn't lay there either.....had to get up

went in the bathroom

and sat there and just rocked and squeeze

and rocked and squeeze

and rocked and squeeze

til

there weren't no more tears to squeeze

and you know what?.....been feelin better ever since

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F Eb9 F Eb9 F Eb9 F Eb9
 Love let me love I want to love my-self
 F Eb9 F Eb9 Db Eb F Eb9 F Eb9 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7
 let me love my-self let me be-lieve
 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 F7 Ebmaj7
 in my ten-der-ness; Let me be proud of my soft-ness.
 F7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Gm7 Am7 Gm7 Gb7 Fmaj7 Eb7 F7 Eb7
 And my eyes that see and cry for joy for pain lots of
 F7 Emaj7 Eb7 D7 Dbmaj7 F Fmaj7 Gm7
 pain, a lit-tle joy. And my mouth it sings it
 Am7 Gm7 Gb7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7
 stings it clings and ling-ers on him on his neck just be-low his
 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 F7 Ebmaj7 F7 Ebmaj7
 ear. His eyes are my mirror my home is his mind. His
 Fmaj7 Eb Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 Fmaj7 Ebmaj7 F Eb9 F Eb9
 hands, his hands, his hands, his hands Love let me
 F Eb9 F Eb9 F Eb9 F Eb9 F Eb9 Db Eb9
 love I want to love my-self. Let me love my-
 F Eb9 Db Eb9 F
 self. My-self, my-self. my-self.

police boys are expert marksmen

so
they be knowin what they be doin.
Oh well...I guess they shot her in the chest for her own protection.

I pray to God I NEVER come face-to-face with police protection.
And unless you got some powerful connections
you better pray for the same thing.

But if I do...if my death is sponsored by one of the boys in blue...
I hope the Lord will give me enough strength
to spit blood in that sucker's face.
And with my last breath
I want to say two words to him.....YO' MAMA!!!

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LETTER TO YOUNG SISTERS by Nancy Dupree

Dear Young Sisters,

I hope this letter finds you feeling good all over yourself.
I hope you've got everything you want just like you want it.
I even hope you've got everything you need just like you need it.
I love my people, but I have a special love for you, Li'l Sis,
and when you're alright, I'm alright.

I can see your eyebrows going up. You don't believe that, do you? No, you don't believe that. You're wondering what kind of game I'm running. You figure there gots to be something funky going down, 'cause folks don't come on like this unless they're gaming. If that's what you're thinking, if that's what's running through your mind, I'm proud of you. I don't want you to be a fool for NOBODY, not even for me. And as to how come I'm writing this, I can only say again: when you're alright, I'm alright. And Honey, you're NOT alright.

See, I watch you. I watch you at the bus stop and downtown and crosstown and 'round town and out of town. I watch you because I want to peep your mind. If I can peep your mind, maybe I'll understand why you be like you be. And if I understand THAT, I might be able to pass on a little something that can help you be like you *want* to be.

Now, I know that some of y'all are perfectly satisfied to be just what you are. Matter of fact, y'all so satisfied that when you see a sister trying to reach for something a little higher or trying to become something a little stronger, you tell lies on her; you scheme on her; you gang up on her. And I want you to know right now, this letter is not for you, 'cause you ain't gonna never be nothing more than you are today which is a bunch of nothing. So when I say "sister", I'm not talking to y'all, 'cause y'all love ugly, and you're dedicated to filth. Only God can change that.

Now, Li'l Sis, back to you. I'm not going to preach at you, 'cause when I was coming along, I didn't like nobody preaching at me. I'd tune them out. And since I'm strong on "Do unto others...", won't be no sermons. Just take what I say and do whatever you want with it. If you can use it, fine. If not, we're still friends.

Now, let me tell you what's worrying me. What's worrying me is you and the Brothers: especially you and the Brothers and them babies. 'Cause what I see at the bus stop is you and the babies. Maybe that's on account of the *man-shortage*. They say there's a *man-shortage*, you know, and ain't EVEN enough of them to go around. Well, if that's the case, how come the maternity wards are so crowded? Apparently there's enough of *something* to go around. If you ask me, the

man-shortage comes in when it's time to face the landlord and the cashier at the grocery store and the preacher. That's where you get your *man-shortage*, Honey.

Now Li'l Sis...please don't read me wrong. I love the Brothers. I pray to God I never stop loving the Brothers, 'cause if I stop loving *men*, I'm in trouble. I just wish they would give me reasons to respect them. I wish they would give me reasons to admire them. I want to respect them. God knows I want to admire them. But most of them won't let me.

Which brings me back to the bus stop with you and your babies and your shopping bags. How am I supposed to respect him when I see you struggling with all that by yourself? You weren't by yourself when you got pregnant, 'cause that takes two.

Now, don't come running to me with your mouth full of stories about how bad he treats you. It's true that he should be man enough not to abuse you, 'cause only a coward abuses his woman. And when he does, he dirties himself. So yeah, he's wrong...dead wrong. But you're wrong too, 'cause the only reason he treats you like he treats you is 'cause you let him. See, I found out that a tyrant cannot be a tyrant without the consent of his victim. And besides, soon as you finish crying on my shoulder, you're going to run to the bank so you'll have some money to give him next time he stop by.

Now Li'l Sis...I'm being hard on you, ain't I? Know why? 'Cause I wish somebody had talked straight to me when I was your age. 'Cause I know how it feels to be young and confused. And 'cause it is my duty as an experienced Black woman to reach out for Black youth. If Black adults don't reach for Black youth, we're *all* in trouble.

So...Li'l Sis...what you gonna do? Can I make a few suggestions? Put them in your pipe and smoke them. If they don't smoke good, dump them and keep trucking.

SUGGESTION #1: With a smile on your face, I want you to hug and kiss your children five times every day. Don't take it out on them. It's not their fault.

SUGGESTION #2: If you don't have any children, PLEASE don't have any children until you can take care of them all by yourself. That means without Mama, without the welfare, and without him ('cause he's gonna probably split, anyway).

SUGGESTION #3: ...which you will call unthinkable, outrageous, unnatural and old-fashioned. Look at yourself in the mirror and say this every day: I DON'T HAVE TO HAVE SEX. See, until you can have everything that goes with it, you're better off without it.

SUGGESTION #4: If you have a man, work *with* him and not *for* him. When you work *for* your man, you make him less than a man.

SUGGESTION #5: Pray. Find out what God's name is and pray. I guarantee that it will solve *ALL* your problems.

Sincerely yours,

P.S. Just a reminder of where you come from. You come from a long line of righteous women. Women like Mary McLeod Bethune and Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks. You're also kin to Cleopatra and Hatshepsut and Zenobia. When you find out who they are, you'll know who you are.

BLACK SUCCESS by Nancy Dupree

Are you successful?

Now, please don't let that question make you flinch and turn away. I don't want to hurt you. As a matter of fact, the only thing I've ever wanted to do is soothe you, sweeten you, and help you heal, 'cause I need soothing and sweetening and healing myself, and I can't do it alone. So please, don't turn away. Let's think this through together.

What do you think it is, this thing they call success? When I look around at my people, I can tell you what it *ain't*. It ain't money; it ain't land; and it sho nuff ain't control of the government. Now, a handful of us have a little bit of this and a little taste of that over yonder and 'round the corner. But I'm not talking about the handful. I'm talking about the multitudes. And our multitudes are moneyless; our multitudes are landless; our multitudes are powerless.

So what does that say?

It says failure...to some. It says "Can't do no better"...to some. Now let me tell you what it says to me. To me it says, "Thru the storm, thru the night, lead me on to the light." To me it says, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound." To me it says, "My soul look back and wonder *how* I got over." Now that's what it says to me. 'Cause I'm not ready to hang no failure sign 'round my neck. And when you hang it on my people, you hang it on me. So you take that sign and shove it.

Black success is different, you know. It's different because our history is different. And we can't cut loose from our history, no matter how much we bleach and fry and paint. And no matter how well we wear the latest fashions, we will always, Always, ALWAYS look like lynchings and rapes and kidnappings and whips and auction blocks. And BECAUSE we look like lynchings and rapes and kidnappings and whips and auction blocks, we will always, Always, ALWAYS be the last hired and the first fired. The schools will never, Never, NEVER stop suspending our children. Prices will always, Always, ALWAYS be higher where we live. The cops will never, Never, NEVER stop kicking our doors down. And before you run that progress thing by me, let me remind you that I'm not talking about the handful. I'm talking about the multitudes. It is dangerous to judge by the handful. It is wise to judge by the multitudes. And our multitudes know about them doors. Our multitudes live with them prices. Ask them about young uns getting sent home from school. Ask THEM for the rundown on job security.

And if you want to hear about success, they're the ones you should listen to. I know a lady who enjoys a good laugh even though her body is broke down from standing on her feet for the last unkeen years making salads in the kitchen at the airport.

I know a couple down in New Orleans who put SIXTEEN CHILDREN THROUGH COLLEGE. I know a mother who keeps on going with her heart busted wide open. Even the fools in the courtroom knew it didn't hold water; but her son went to jail just the same.

Now I can hear you asking, "What does that have to do with success? Success is big cars, fine homes, mink coats. So how are you going to connect coats and cars and houses with laughing and college and somebody who keeps on going?"

I'm gonna come closer to you 'cause I want you to hear my answer real good. If success is what you say it is, what does that make your Mama? Do she drive a big 'chine? Do she wear minks? Did she give you a mansion to grow up in? If success is what you say it is, then your Mama is a failure. If success is what you say it is, then millions of Black mamas are failures 'cause millions of Black mamas just can pay the rent. Millions of Black mamas just can scrape together bus fare. Millions of Black mamas ain't had a new coat in years.

If success is what you say it is, then what does that make you and your brothers and your cousins and your uncles and your aunts and all your relatives and friends? Show me y'all's minks. Show me y'all's thousand acres. And which one of y'all makes REAL decisions in the government? And if you and your whole generation ain't wealthy and powerful, my question is why? Yeah, WHY? Is y'all too dumb? Is y'all too lazy? Or is it that y'all just don't give a booger?

Well...if you and your generation is lazy and dumb and don't-care, me and my generation must be lazy and dumb and don't-care, too, 'cause we ain't wealthy and powerful, neither. Matter of fact, I'm a rent-payer and a bus-rider. And the only fur I own is a possum collar on a coat I bought back in '69. Matter of fact, most of the people I know are rent-payers, and I run into a whole bunch of friends at the bus stop. Matter of fact, if you check the bus-stops and landlords all across this country, you will find that we are bus-riders and rent-payers by the multitudes.

And again I ask why? Was we someplace else when God was passing out brains and spunk? Are we dumb by nature? Are we lazy by nature?

Can I tell you what I think? Let me tell you what I think, and let's put it with what you think and see what we come out with.

I think that in the United States of America you have two major groups of people. Group one: descendents of slaves. Group two: descendents of enslavers.

Descendents of slaves come in a multitude of colors...from velvet black to honey brown to sweet moonlight. Descendents of slaves are full of music. They laugh music; they walk music. There's music in their heartbreak, music in their memories.

Descendents of slaves try to escape their memories. Memories of lynchings, memories of rapes, memories of kidnappings, whips and auction blocks. Escape through skin-lighteners and hot combs and makeup; escape through TV and fashions and sex; escape through teasing and laughing and dancing. Escape from thinking. Escape from remembering.

And the desire to escape is natural 'cause the memories cut like razors. Memories like, "We rented the apartment just a few minutes before you called." Memories like, "We'll keep your application on file." Like, "This kind of behavior will NOT be tolerated in our school." Like, "GRAND JURY RULES JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE IN POLICE KILLING OF NINE-YEAR-OLD". So yeah, the desire to escape is natural 'cause the memories cut like razors.

Descendents of slaves have two shadows. One is a body-shadow, and it's natural and innocent and friendly. It goes wherever

you go and it moves whenever you move. The other one also goes where you go and moves when you move, but it ain't natural: it's forced on you. It ain't innocent: it's cunning. And it sho nuff ain't friendly: it's a deadly enemy. And the enemy's name is fear. Fear. FEAR. It's the constant companion of all slave descendants from the handful throughout the multitudes. Fear of dum-dum bullets. Fear of courtrooms. Fear of job-interviews. Fear of apartment-hunting. Fear of the dean's office. Fear of the boss's office. Fear of the welfare office. Fear of the landlord. Real, living, stinking fear. Our history has taught us to fear.

And yeah, we try to escape it...through skin-lighteners and hot combs and makeup; through TV and fashions and sex; through teasing and laughing and dancing. But no matter how loud we laugh; no matter how long we stay in the bedroom; no matter how many times we straighten our hair, fear remains our shadow.

That's howcome sixteen children through college and laughter from a tired, sick lady, and a mother who keeps on going are outrageously astounding. They do all that in spite of. ANYTHING DONE BY SLAVE DESCENDENTS HAS GOT TO BE DONE IN SPITE OF. In spite of the bullets; in spite of the courtrooms; in spite of the schools; in spite of the fear.

And we DO it. You do it and I do it. Your Mama does it, my cousin does it. Your uncle does it, my Aunt Sweet did it. Your brother, my sister, your friends, my friends. We all manage to laugh sometime. We all make some love. We even fry up some chicken. And we can sho nuff pop some fingers.

Some of us live in the suburbs. A lot of us live in the projects. Some of us go to college. A lot of us go to jail. But college or jail, suburbs or projects, we all can claim distinction.

We have managed to LIVE! We continue to LIVE!

And THAT IS BLACK SUCCESS!!!

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THE SWINGING FOOT by Nancy Dupree

Slave-descendants can be roughly divided into two groups: those who believe the propaganda and those who don't. Now, if you don't know about the propaganda, I'm afraid you're not ready for this poem. So why don't you slide on out and come back when you've got some knowledge under your belt.

Anyway, like I said, slave-descendants can be roughly divided into two groups: those who believe the propaganda and those who don't.

Among the believers you got them that make no bones about what they be. They believe and that's that. And what they say to Flossie and Willie and Bertha is the same thing they say to Mayor Smiley and Chief Killings and Congressman Slewfoot. To them the propaganda is gospel truth, and they live by it. Even if you don't agree with them, you've got to give them credit for being honest.

Other believers be sly with their stuff. The propaganda is gospel truth to them, too, but they say one thing to Flossie and them and something completely different to Congressman Slewfoot. Man, when they're with Flossie and Willie and Bertha, they talks that talk. They walks the floor. They grits their teeth. They pounds the poor table into sawdust. But oh, you ought to be a fly on the wall when they're talking to the mayor. "Willie said....." "Flossie said....." "And what they plan to do is....." "Boss, you know you can depend on me to stop them, just like always." And they puts their hand inside their zipper, and they grins from where they sit to where they see.

Then you got believers who don't know they believe. They be spilling their guts to the wrong people at the right time. Voting for the wrong candidate for the right reason. And they spend up all their little money, buying the wrong thing. Just kinda fumbling 'round and messing up all over everywhere. Poor things, they mean well; they just don't know. Which makes them dangerous 'cause they get used by them that do.

Now that's one side. Let's move over to the other side.

Them folks on the other side be's VERY suspicious. You know the saying, "Believe nothing you hear and only half of what you see"? Now, that's what THEY live by. TV? Schools? Leaders? They take all that with a BOX of salt. And they don't spill their guts. And they don't grin unless they're gaming. And before they suck in whatever happens to be the latest, they check out where it came from and who gets the profits.

And y'all, believers *despise* them. Believers watch them. Believers eavesdrop on them. And when they get their lies together, believers gang up on them. Believers strain so hard to destroy them, they get hemorrhoids.

And I don't know why it's like that. Are they protecting something? What have they got to protect? That little bit they do got can be snatched over cocktails. And if what you got can be snatched that easy, it ain't yours. So they be going through all them changes, buying all the Preparation H protecting what really belong to somebody else.

And when that *somebody else* turns around and draws back that leg and swings that foot dead up the middle of them hemorrhoids...WHEW! They swing so hard, their foot be hanging out of his mouth. And the only thing the poor believer can say is "PLEASE". They're good at begging, you know.

Sometimes the pain is so bad, it makes him wake up. And when he wakes up he stops believing. And when he stops believing, he starts being real. And if enough of them start being real....

I'm not worried about the believers, myself. I know that just as long as my people stay black, that foot is going to swing.

AND IT'S THE SWINGING FOOT THAT WILL BRING US TOGETHER.

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FL 9787 NANCY DUPREE: SWEET THUNDER. Black poetry read by the poet. Introduction: My People Is, Bats and Butterflies, First Love, New Low, The Brothers, Let Me, Happy 4th of July, Y'All, Herd Runners, Self-Love, Descriptive Notes, 1-12" LP \$6.98