

A California Love Story

For Sherley Anne Williams and Marvin X

by

Jasmine Marshall Armstrong

At the Ashby Street BART station,
we sit at his card table,
among the panoply of items
for sale, from hand died dashikis
to raw honey that promises
to cure your allergies, keep
infections at bay.
Marvin speaks on Sherley Ann,
Gone fourteen years,
From the torrey pines
of San Diego, where she bruned
so bright with words and truth,
with making poems out
of Ray Charles and Bessie,
The records she'd play
In the Nighttime, hearing Blues
so true, it walked the continent,
jumped the color line,
spoke to the heart of Sher'Anne—
Who worked cotton
as a child in the 50s, warmed
only by fire in a metal drum,
out in Cochran, Stratford,
Waco, Firebaugh.
Marvin tells me the Blues
and the truth of Malcolm,
Baldwin, Baraka—
reached in their souls,
out in California—
On the westside of Fresno,
two young folks
in love, with their own
Black beauty, not Whiteness
of Magnolias, or Movies.

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They ran in tandem,
toward hope, and power—
That was beyond green-eyed
monsters of academia,
or the towns that expected
them to be servants,
to work cotton or hay,
to always have the fare.
Marvin remembers Sher'Anne
beautiful, at the height
of her powers, an ebony
Phoenix no one can burn—
Her words immortal.