

LAST AFFAIR: BESSIE'S BLUES SONG

Disarticulated  
arm torn out,  
large veins cross  
her shoulder intact,  
her tourniquet  
her blood in all white big bands:

*"Can't you see what love  
and romance has done to me?  
I'm not the same as I used to be,  
this is my last affair."*

Mailtruck or parked car  
in the fast lane,  
afloat at forty-three  
on a Mississippi road,  
200 pound muscle on her ham bone,  
'nother nigger dead 'fore noon:

*"Can't you see what love  
and romance has done to me?  
I'm not the same as I used to be,  
this is my last affair."*

Fifty dollar record  
cut the vein in her neck,  
fool about her money  
toll her black trainwreck,  
white press missed her fun'ral  
in the same stacked deck:

*"Can't you see what love  
and romance has done to me?  
I'm not the same as I used to be,  
this is my last affair."*

Loved a little blackbird  
heard she could sing,  
Martha in her vineyard  
pestle in her spring,  
Bessie had a bad mouth  
made my chimes ring:

*“Can’t you see what love  
and romance has done to me?  
I’m not the same as I used to be,  
this is my last affair.”*

*Michael S. Harper*  
(copyright by author)

## THE BURIED SWORD

at the place where two rivers meet I am alone  
I am always by myself  
I am like a captain dancing in the night sky  
saying aye-aye to himself  
I am like a mourning ship in the waters of dead horses  
my blade is a mirror where no one stands  
I open my eyes and I see a cavalry of ghost riders  
looking for their ring fingers and feet  
and the boots falling out of the stirrups at dawn  
and the plumed hats of battle drifting away  
I only led the dead  
the brave that don’t sing  
know not to pick me up again  
I only want to sleep where there is no saluting  
the moon is a bullet the night is a pistol  
and death is a horse and silence the rider

1962