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Alice

Michael S. Harper

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Are teaching one god  
They are ripping the limbs  
Off our fetishes  
They are carving the sea  
Monsters from our totems  
They made a pile of our  
Wood sculpture and set fire  
To it

Julian  
Come back  
Rude hags  
Have crashed the senate  
And are spitting on the  
Elders

Meanwhile, Julian  
The perennial art major  
Ponders in the right wing  
Of the monastery museum

The Egyptian collection

## Alice / Michael S. Harper

*"The word made stone, the stone word"*

*"A RITE is an action the very form of which is the  
result of a Divine Revelation."*

I

You stand waist-high in snakes  
beating the weeds for the gravebed  
a quarter mile from the nearest  
relative, an open field in Florida: lost,  
looking for Zora, and when she speaks  
from her sunken chamber to call  
you to her side, she calls  
you her distant cousin, her sister  
come to mark her burial place  
with bright black stone.  
She has known you would do this—

*her crooked stick, her straight lick—*  
and the lie you would have to tell  
to find her, and that you lied  
to her relatives in a conjure-riddle  
of the words you have uttered,  
calling her to communion.

A black rock of ages you have placed  
where there was no marker,  
and though the snakes abound  
in this preserve from ancestral space,  
you have paid your homage  
in traditional line, the face open:  
your face in the woman-light of surrender  
toughened in what you were.

II

Floods of truth flow from your limbs  
of these pages in a vision swollen  
in experience and pain:  
that child you stepped into blossom  
of a man's skull beaten into smile  
of submission, you gathering horse nectar  
for offering over a baby's crusted gasp,  
for centuries of motherhood and atonement  
for which you write, and the rite written.

And for this I say your name: Alice,  
my grandmother's name, your name,  
conjured in snake-infested field  
where Zora Neale welcomed you home,  
and where I speak from now  
on higher ground of her risen  
black marker where you have written  
your name in hers, and in mine.

*for Alice Walker*