

Black

By Maggie Redding

At the front of the classroom  
I stood, big, black, six feet tall,  
Hands in pockets, my heart blacker than my skin.  
Mr. Rooney came in.  
He sat on a chair at the back.  
He faced me. I made no move,  
I just looked at him. To me,  
Mr. Puny, as he was known,  
was too old to understand me.  
He was pale, his hair, his skin.  
The pale eyes of Mr. Puny gazed  
at me unflinching, for a long time.  
I gazed back.  
What did he see? Or expect?  
Did he fear me? Or did he fear losing his control?  
That I would challenge his power?  
his authority, his status?  
All that was bestowed on him  
by his skin colour,  
his easy entry into  
the privilege of learning.  
What did I have to counter  
this assumed superiority status?  
Only the power of my black heart, my colour.  
He thought I had a weapon.  
Unexpectedly, he pricked the tension.  
As he felt in his pocket,  
I heard the jangle of coins.  
He smiled faintly, a pale smile.  
“Fancy a coffee?”  
I took a deep breath.  
Do I want concord with people like him,  
unfamiliar, unknown?  
I want them to fear us  
as much as we fear them.  
Weakly, I said “Yes.”  
“How do you like your coffee?”  
“Black,” I said.