

## mistress stella speaks

you think i'm his property  
'cause he paid cash  
to grab me by the neck,  
swing me 'cross his knee  
and stroke the living song from my hips.

you think he is master of all  
my twelve tongues, spreading notes  
thick as a starless night, strangling spine  
till my voice is a jungle of chords.

the truth is that i owned him  
since the word *love* first blessed his lips  
since *hurt* and *flight* and *free*  
carved their way into the cotton  
fused bones of his fretting hand,  
since he learned how pleading men hunt  
for my face in the well of their throats  
till their tongues are soaked with want.

yes, each day he comes back  
home from the fields,  
from chain gang fury,  
from the smell of sometime women  
who borrow his body. he bends  
his weight around me  
like a wilting weed,  
drinking in my kiss  
of fretboard across fingertip  
'til he can stand up straight again,  
aching from what he left behind,  
rising sure as dawn.