

# The Dark in Me; Tiny Windows

Sheree La Puma

**M**y kids move out having grown into that space where they are half adult/half toddler. I'm working at a foodbank to pay off a speeding ticket, community service. Broke, bored, searching for a drug to see me through, god, therapy.

The foodbank is an antidote for two poisons, it kills time, and keeps me from starving. I pick through rotting fruit, black bananas, a moldy orange, donations from a big-name store that wants to clear out garbage and feel good about it at the same time. My hands throb from the freezing air and I vow to write my way out of this story. When we finished stocking shelves I sit and philosophize with Margaret, an 84-year-old devout Christian who tells me that if I'd die today, I'm going straight to hell. This seems overly harsh. I've always thought of myself as a good person. "There are rules," she says, "commandments, that can't be broken." Shacking up with my lover is one of them. I'm not big fan of the Bible. She tells me I've been collecting sins.

I discuss eloping with my man. He rolls his eyes, tells me to get a real job and he'll think about it. That sets me off, makes me rethink my choices. I take a ghostwriting gig in Ghana, Africa on a whim. The money is terrible. I stay in a one-star hotel, end up further in debt, but it feels good at the time. I meet a man there who takes me to Elmina Castle, a former slave fort. It's my day off. I want to learn some history. There are two divergent stories here. Only one is true. I stand-still on a bridge overlooking basement dungeons that once housed dead and dying captives. They don't teach us this at home, I say. I wander inside a dark, damp, airless space. Slaves were held like cattle here, months at a time. There is fossilized waste on the walls, lines like rings in the

trunk of a tree, a record of human suffering. Something in me snaps. I weep, overwhelmed with the shame of it all. Without judgement, the man holds my hand in his. Light streams in through two small windows, slits at the top of the cell. I imagine the sun naked and warm. I feel the breath of 1000 souls on my body, close my eyes. When the door swings open into the courtyard, I raise my arms in gratitude. I will never worry about dying again. I am almost brave.

**Sheree La Puma** is an award-winning writer whose personal essays, fiction, and poetry have appeared in or are forthcoming in *The Penn Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Chiron Review*, *The Rumpus*, and *Redivider*, among others. Her poetry was recently nominated for Best of The Net and two Pushcarts. She has a new chapbook, *Broken: Do Not Use*, recently released with Main Street Rag Publishing. She received an MFA in Writing from the California Institute of the Arts and taught poetry to former gang members. [www.shereelapuma.com](http://www.shereelapuma.com)