

## Skin of Garments

*Melodie Jackson*

Before I clothe myself in the holy garments of my grandmother's priest-hood, my hands thin cocoa butter over the veins of my temple.

I have to protect my skin.

Knowing how bans restrict circulation—that suffocate me from my Mother's womb—a Mother that has been stripped of her Kente garments and clothed in the colonial cloaks of sanguine covenants,

I place a dab of the cream into my palm.

I join both hands, a celestial union worthy of eternal increase, and allow myself to feel water in the desert.

I reach for my back first.

Once, before knowing how unfamiliar fabric interacts with foreign beings, I directly clothed my body with those coats of skin.

It burned.

My skin tightened.

seized.

I thought I heard it weep. Asking why I would supplant its skin for another. Wondering whether Adam and Eve left the garden with scratched thighs and scarred legs from skin that wasn't formed by God.

Maybe it thought that was I skinning my skin for skin alternative.

Except

my body was alter native enough.

I rub into the crevices and bones of my back, making sure to submerge the paths of my amsistas' steps. I imagine that cotton against a back without water indeed burns until baptisms of Sahara flood all the dry places.

I move to my shoulders, then arms.

They feel heavy. Weighed down from reaching. Reaching for just the hem of garments. To make my temple and Eloher's temple one eternal round. But they say my issue of blood is too bright for their marble.

I cannot clothe the crimson cloaks until they spill the blood.

Maybe it is the *cloth* that is rejecting

my skin.

My torso welcomes the ointment. Covering my nakedness in ways that Ham forgot. Soothing the mark left by Shem and Japheth's negligent garment. That was sanded across my limbs until it turned me black.

The balm glides over my legs until I hit my feet. I think this is my Gilead. Refusing to forget the garment, that has just been whole underneath His feet, rented; torn; bloodied.

Because old garments and new bodies, bodies made whole by new garments and old bodies, do not endure in the presence of crucifixions and crumbling temples.

When the ritual is finished, you place the holy garment of my daughter's priesthood over my feet.

My legs.

My torso.

My arms.

My shoulders.

My back.

And together the temples whisper.

Thank You for Protecting My Skin.