A California Love Story
For Sherley Anne Williams and Marvin X
by
Jasmine Marshall Armstrong

At the Ashby Street BART station, we sit at his card table, among the panoply of items for sale, from hand died dashikis to raw honey that promises to cure your allergies, keep infections at bay. Marvin speaks on Sherley Ann, Gone fourteen years, From the torrey pines of San Diego, where she shined so bright with words and truth, with making poems out of Ray Charles and Bessie, The records she’d play In the Nighttime, hearing Blues so true, it walked the continent, jumped the color line, spoke to the heart of Sher’Anne— Who worked cotton as a child in the 50s, warmed only by fire in a metal drum, out in Cochran, Stratford, Waco, Firebaugh. Marvin tells me the Blues and the truth of Malcolm, Baldwin, Baraka— reached in their souls, out in California— On the westside of Fresno, two young folks in love, with their own Black beauty, not Whiteness of Magnolias, or Movies.

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They ran in tandem,
toward hope, and power—
That was beyond green-eyed
monsters of academia,
or the towns that expected
them to be servants,
to work cotton or hay,
to always have the fare.
Marvin remembers Sher’Anne
beautiful, at the height
of her powers, an ebony
Phoenix no one can burn—
Her words immortal.