

# Telephone Conversation

Wole Soyinka

The price seemed reasonable, location  
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived  
Off premises. Nothing remained  
But self-confession. "Madam" , I warned,  
"I hate a wasted journey - I am African."  
Silence. Silenced transmission of pressurized  
good-breeding. Voice, when it came,  
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled  
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.  
"HOW DARK?"...I had not misheard...."ARE YOU  
LIGHT OR VERY DARK?" Button B. Button A.  
Stench  
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.  
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered  
Omnibus squelching tar.  
It was real! Shamed  
By ill-mannered silence, surrender  
Pushed dumbfoundment to beg simplification.  
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis-

"ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT" Revelation  
came

"You mean- like plain or milk chocolate?"

Her accent was clinical, crushing in its light  
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted  
I chose. "West African sepia"\_ and as  
afterthought.

"Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic  
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness chaged her accent  
Hard on the mouthpiece "WHAT'S THAT?"  
conceding "DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." "Like  
brunette."

"THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?"

"Not altogether.

Facially, I am brunette, but madam you should  
see the rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my  
feet.

Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused-

Foolishly madam- by sitting down, has turned

My bottom raven black- One moment madam! -  
sensing

Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap

About my ears- "Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't you

---

rather

See for yourself?"

---