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Wrong Number

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RIMBAUD IN AFRICA

His lids sprang wide to drink the morning scene,
 He smiled, cursed, beat the spider on his thigh.
 Sleep was a sowing and the crop was green
 Until the light of morning seared his eye . . .
 Now this—forever, this mad continent
 Reaching for him with naked monkey hands,
 Unwinding from his heart its cerement,
 Tormenting him with Negro sarabands.

He heard the soft black footsteps coming in.
 He closed his eyes against the tattooed breast.
 He willed himself asleep. But no—the thin
 Rank odor groping from its nest
 Assailed him stronger than the dream of death.
 The wet lips swallowed his and drank his breath.

JOSEPH CHERWINSKI

WRONG NUMBER

*The line is through,
 The connection made;
 The ear at the phone:
 No word is said*

Our limbs were joined
 In locked embrace,
 But the single pulse
 Told the ghost's release;
 A medic probed
 The inward wound,
 But never a trace
 Of heart he found.

*A portly priest,
 His lips at the phone,
 Answers for God,
 Who is not at home.*

RAY B. WEST, JR.