

ShootingStar

ISSN 0892-1407

Black Literary Magazine

\$1.95

R
E
V
I
E
W

MAGICAL
WONDROUS
And
SPOOKY THINGS



Nicaraguan Dream

Sweating profusely and biting the bullet,
Athena is to be delivered of a child again, and this so
soon after Viet Nam.

There have been many, so many
since that first hard lance broke her maidenhead
and brought her into wisdom.

Rumors fly about the mysterious father of the child.
No one seems to know exactly who he is.
He may be Democracy or Imperialism or Socialism or
Totalitarianism
or the very hip and au courant Self-Determination
or a superfecundation of all the above.
I overheard Costa Rica and Salvador fanning the fires of
those rumors
by saying that the father's real name is:
The Hunger Of The Many When The Land Is Owned
By The Few.
Predictable Athena, following her pattern of never naming
the child after its sire.

The organized terror of war is being born again
as the third stringers of the Stars and Stripes and of the
Hammer and Sickle
wait for the two-headed coin toss to determine who will
kick-off.

But the party is happening outside
on the dull black tarmac of the huge parking lot.
The Guatemalan maid makes our drinks cold and strong
and you got your beer and I got my tequila
and she got her chablis and he got his bourbon
and Mister T and Joan Collins will be here soon
to join Ron and Fritz and Gerry and George
and we are good fellows all at this tail gate party
in and outside my twenty-five thousand dollar
customized van.
Later Prince will come and bring Revolution
and gentle Michael Jackson will stop by on his Victory
Tour.

We'll drink and eat and laugh it up
and wipe the blood from our mouths with the backs of
our hands.

Michael will moonwalk the length and breadth of the
lot.

Prince will boogie up a sweat in the January cold
and is that Twisted Sister coming this way?
Anyway the music is — Hotdamn!! — plugged in.
Fritz, George, Gerry, and Ron will make speeches into
their mixed drinks.
During time outs, we'll all watch the death squads on our
small Zenith color tv
as they delicately draw the smoking muzzles of their hot
Uzzis
across the cold skins of dark-skinned peoples.
Joan will throw her head back, smile seductively and
breathe deeply.
Mister T will grimace and repeatedly smack a fist into
his open palm
while the rest of us smile and warm our hands by the
microwave oven.

And oh oh oh our bright-eyed healthy children,
silver braces gleaming in the afternoon sun,
will keep an absolutely accurate body count
with the solar calculators Santa brought them last
Christmas.

Half Time on the 50 yard line,
two burly, bearded, cigar smoking midwives,
dressed in blood-stained, camouflaged fatigues
are pulling the squalling infant feet first from Athena,
flakes of grey ash from their cigars falling onto Athena's
trembling blood-smeared thighs.
We cheer and raise our glasses in a toast to the mother
(as we impatiently wait for the instant replay)
who has delivered without benefit of anesthesia,
and we drink to the future of this squalling newborn,
who will help to make the world safe from communism.

As for me, I can't wait for the third quarter action.

—Eugene Howard



This most magical, wondrous and spooky cover illustration was created especially for *Shooting Star Review* by Pittsburgh artist Waitmond L. Vire, Jr.

Vire participated in the Carnegie Mellon University Scholars Program and graduated from Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh and California State College (California, Pennsylvania) in 1978.

Vire is especially adept with oil paint, air brush, water colors and leroy pen. He also works with drawing inks, liquidtex acrylic colors, color creation film and many other art forms.

His special interests include portrait painting, photography, music and taping, mechanical models and reading.

Publisher's Statement

A friend who understands other worlds once said that there are people walking about who don't have shadows. This friend further explained—matter-of-factly—that there are werewolves, possessed minds, who slaughter for reasons other than their own and human vampires who must drink blood.

Despite these phenomena, one of the spookiest elements of the African-American experience is that too many don't understand and value our historically rich and diverse culture. That, in itself, is frightening because the appreciation of a people's culture (no matter how peculiar) is essential to current concepts of civilization. A people without a unique culture are like beings without shadows.

A cultural heritage (even when influenced by deprivation and subjugation) also provides a sense of history. Thus, George Santayana's message from *The Life of Reason* is worth repeating:

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

In 1937, African-American sculptress Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968) created a haunting work called "Talking Skull." Fuller presented a young man poignantly beseeching death to share its secrets. The youth stares into his own destiny and asks for his past.

Shooting Star Review's third issue froths with the fanciful of this bewitched season. Still, I hope that we all find catalysts here that push us to study, search, share and remember because... everything that goes around comes around... every energy that we send out returns to us multiplied, and... whether dealing with corporeal or spiritual demons, remember

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Publisher

Shooting Star Review is an educational magazine that uses the literary and visual arts to explore the African-American experience.





ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1901, 1902 and 1903...depending on the date that suited her. She was high yellow, coal black and reddish brown...depending on who described her. And, in the last 35 years, others said that this prolific writer was a black radical, a Republican conservative and a Happy Darkie who sold out to white patrons.

Hurston grew up in Eatonville, Florida. She described her birthplace as "a pure Negro town" with a black mayor, council, marshall, charter...the works. However, the warm environment that nurtured Hurston on black folktales and ethnic pride also sheltered her from the Southland's flagrantly brutal racism.

"Jump at de sun," Hurston's mother urged. And, combining her rich cultural heritage with skills acquired at Barnard College as well as Howard and Columbia Universities, Hurston produced a treasury of Black folklore. One of her earliest books, *Mules and Men*, had a chapter called "Formulae of HooDoo Doctors" where Hurston recorded these prescriptions:

- If you suspect that a person has been killed by hoodoo, put a cassava stick in the hand and he will

punish the murderer. If he is killed by violence, put the stick in one hand and a knife and fork in the other. The spirit of the murdered one will first drive the slayer insane, and then kill him with great violence.

- Take nine lumps of starch, nine of sugar, nine teaspoons of steel dust. Wet it all with Jockey Club cologne. Take nine pieces of ribbon, blue, red or yellow. Take a dessertspoonful and put it on a piece of ribbon and tie it in a bag. As each fold is gathered together call his name. As you wrap it with yellow thread call his name till you finish. Make nine bags and place them under a rug, behind an armoire, under a step or over a door. They will love you and give you everything they can get. Distance makes no difference. Your mind is talking to his mind and nothing beats that.

Mules and Men was published in an era stung by the Scottsboro Trial. The Black community attacked Hurston's work for its simplistic portrayal of Black people and its implied insensitivity to the terrors that Southern Black people faced.

Hurston's later novels, *Dust Tracks on a Road* and *Their Eyes Were Watching*

God, also attracted seering criticism from the Black community while garnering the support of wealthy white patrons. During a time when Black writers created characters victimized by a Jim Crow system, Hurston promoted Black people's vision, laughter, creativity and joy.

Hurston was a dynamic and beautiful woman who was fiercely independent, liberated, arrogant, unconventional and outspoken. She felt that the 1954 Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools was a slap in the face of Southern Black students and teachers because she did not feel that Black people needed white association to better themselves.

Along with Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, Hurston was among the few Black writers of the Harlem Renaissance era who earned a living from their writing. Yet, Hurston's largest royalty check was \$943.75 and sales of her work never exceeded 5,000 copies. Zora Neale Hurston died in 1960. By then, she was penniless and lived in a Florida welfare home. Her remains were placed in an unmarked grave in a segregated cemetery. In 1973, Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, erected a grave stone in Hurston's honor. ★

ShootingStar

REVIEW

SHOOTING STAR REVIEW
ISSN 0892-1407

C O N T E N T S

PUBLISHER
Sandra Gould Ford

EDITORIAL BOARD

Dr. Dennis Brutus
Jane Todd Cooper
Carla DuPre
Sharon G. Flake
Toni McKain
Gilbert Moses
Linda Watkins

ADVISORY BOARD
Christina Addoh
Marvin Anderson
Anne Louise Backauskas
Robert Brevard
Byrd R. Brown, Esq.
Charleen Everette Brown, M.Ed.

Oliver Byrd
David Feehan
Lenore Gardner
Phyllis Moorman Goode
Dr. Vernelle Lillie
Dr. Huberta Jackson Lowman
Fred Myers
Ed Pugh
Dr. Barbara Sizemore
Robert Teeter
Joseph Thomas
Eustace Uku, Esq.
Glenn Ward
Chuck Woodson

ARTS ADVISORY BOARD
Jeffrey Allen
Robert Brevard
Deborah Freeman
Connie Kerr
Juanita Miller
Dr. Ralph Proctor

Fall Issue, 1987
Volume 1, Number 3

Shooting Star Review
7123 Race Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15208
(412) 731-7039
Published quarterly in 1987.
All rights reserved.

Write or call for
Advertising rates.
Single copy \$2.
One year subscription \$7.
Institutional rate \$12.
Open submission policy for
short fiction, essays,
reviews and poetry.
Must be typed with SASE.
Send SASE for guidelines.

ESSAYS/LITTLE STORIES
American Negro Folktales
by Richard Dorson 14

FEATURED ARTIST
Zora Neale Hurston
by Sharon G. Flake 2

FICTION
Broken Cat Glass
by Kamilah Bilal 7
Brown Gardenias
by Kristin Hunter 17

ILLUSTRATION
See No Evil
by Dee Currin 6

POETRY
Nicaraguan Dream
by Eugene Howard inside front cover
The Essential Etheridge Knight 4
Feeling the Darkness
by Fr. Benedict Auer, OSB 9
Minotaur
by Gilbert Moses 12
There Was a Girl
by Dennis Brutus 24

QUIZ
The Spookiest!! 10

REVIEWS
Brave African Huntress 11

WHITE THOUGHT FORUM
They say
by Louis John Hester-Mitich 25
Perhaps I Expect Too Much of Your Immortality
by R. Blain Andrus 25

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Special recognition must be given to Jeffrey Allen who worked tirelessly to design, layout and build the appearance of this most special issue. Grateful thanks is also extended to the wonderful artists whose illustrations brighten these pages. Further acknowledgement must be given to Karen Caraway for the African line drawings that come from her book titled *African Designs of Nigeria and the Cameroons*.



*Remember, there were poets before
there were printing presses.*

Etheridge Knight

Etheridge Knight is the magical writer who authored *Poems From Prison*, *Belly Songs and Other Poems* and *Born of a Woman*. Knight displays a deeply knowing sense of the African-American experience. He's not a "tourist," who stopped just long enough to catch the rhythm and melody. And, like an alchemist, he takes the raw elements of living Black in America and he transforms the base experiences into gold, pearls and diamonds.

Knight once said, in Elsa Honing Fine's *The Afro-American Artist*:

The Black artist has a duty . . . (to) make his heart beat with the same rhythm as the hearts in Black people. He must listen to the drums and then tell people the messages that they themselves have seen.

Knight is true to his creed. Thus, his poetry offers delicate and enduring stories that reveal our battered and abused and beautiful souls.

The following poems are reprinted from *The Essential Etheridge Knight* by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press ©1986 by Etheridge Knight.

The Essential Etheridge Knight won a 1987 American Book Award.



DARK PROPHECY: I SING OF SHINE

And, yeah, brothers,
while white/america sings about the unsinkable molly brown
(who was hustling the titanic when it went down)

I sing to thee of Shine
the stoker who was hip enough to flee the fucking ship
and let the white folks drown
with screams on their lips
(jumped his black ass into the dark sea, Shine did,
broke free from the straining steel).

Yeah, I sing to thee of Shine
and how the millionaire banker stood on the deck
and pulled from his pockets a million dollar check
saying Shine Shine save poor me
and I'll give you all the money a black boy needs—
how Shine looked at the money and then at the sea
and said jump in mothafucka and swim like me—
And Shine swam on—Shine swam on—
and how the banker's daughter ran naked on the deck
with her pink tits trembling and her pants roun her neck,
screaming Shine Shine save poor me
and I'll give you all the pussy a black boy needs—
how Shine said now pussy is good and that's no jive
but you got to swim not fuck to stay alive—
And Shine swam on Shine swam on—

How Shine swam past a preacher afloat on a board
crying save me nigger Shine in the name of the Lord—
and how the preacher grabbed Shine's arm and broke his stroke—
how Shine pulled his shank and cut the preacher's throat—
And Shine swam on—Shine swam on—
And when the news hit shore that the titanic had sunk
Shine was up in Harlem damn near drunk

HE SEES THROUGH STONE

He sees through stone
 he has the secret
 eyes this old black one
 who under prison skies
 sits pressed by the sun
 against the western wall
 his pipe between purple gums

the years fall
 like overripe plums
 bursting red flesh
 on the dark earth

his time is not my time
 but I have known him
 in a time gone

he led me trembling cold
 into the dark forest
 taught me the secret rites
 to make it with a woman
 to be true to my brothers
 to make my spear drink
 the blood of my enemies

now black cats circle him
 flash white teeth
 snarl at the air
 mashing green grass beneath
 shining muscles

ears peeling his words
 he smiles
 he knows
 the hunt the enemy
 he has the secret eyes
 he sees through stone

FOR FRECKLE- FACED GERALD

Now you take ol Rufus. He beat drums,
 was free and funky under the arms,
 fucked white girls, jumped off a bridge
 (and thought nothing of the sacrilege),
 he copped out — and he was over twenty-one.

Take Gerald. Sixteen years hadn't even done
 a good job on his voice. He didn't even know
 how to talk tough, or how to hide the glow
 of life before he was thrown in as "pigmeat"
 for the buzzards to eat.

Gerald, who had no memory or hope of copper hot lips —
 of firm upthrusting thighs
 to reinforce his flow,
 let tall walls and buzzards change the course
 of his river from south to north.

(No safety in numbers, like back on the block:
 two's a plenty, three? definitely not.
 four? "you're all muslims."
 five? "you were planning a race riot."
 plus, Gerald could never quite win
 with his precise speech and innocent grin
 the trust and fists of the young black cats.)

Gerald, sun-kissed ten thousand times on the nose
 and cheeks, didn't stand a chance,
 didn't even know that the loss of his balls
 had been plotted years in advance
 by wiser and bigger buzzards than those
 who now hover above his track
 and at night light upon his back.





© Dee Currin 1986

SEE NO EVIL

Pen and Ink

Delores Currin, a native of Pittsburgh, has been involved in art since she was a child selling her drawings door to door in her Homewood neighborhood.

She received her Associates degree in Visual Communications from the Ivy School of Professional Art in 1980. Since then, Dee has been involved in gallery shows as an individual artist and as a member of the women's art collective "Visions."

A romantic at heart, Dee takes special interest in the Art Nouveau style.

She is very design oriented, and her art work boasts a distinct painterly quality. Presently, Dee prefers pen and ink designs, though the mediums she uses include: acrylics, oils and pencil. She is also skilled in the art of printmaking, calligraphy and photography.

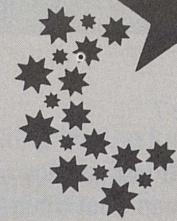
Dee illustrated "Desiree's Baby" in Shooting Star's first issue, and she has recently become a contributing artist to the greeting card company These Three. Her art work is included in several private collections.

Dee derives inspiration from all aspects of her environment. She also harbors a curiosity for and fascination with fantasy and symbolic images. These interests are reflected in the hieroglyphic motifs she often incorporates into her designs and paintings.

She greatly admires the work of the painters Maxfield Parrish and John Singer Sargent.

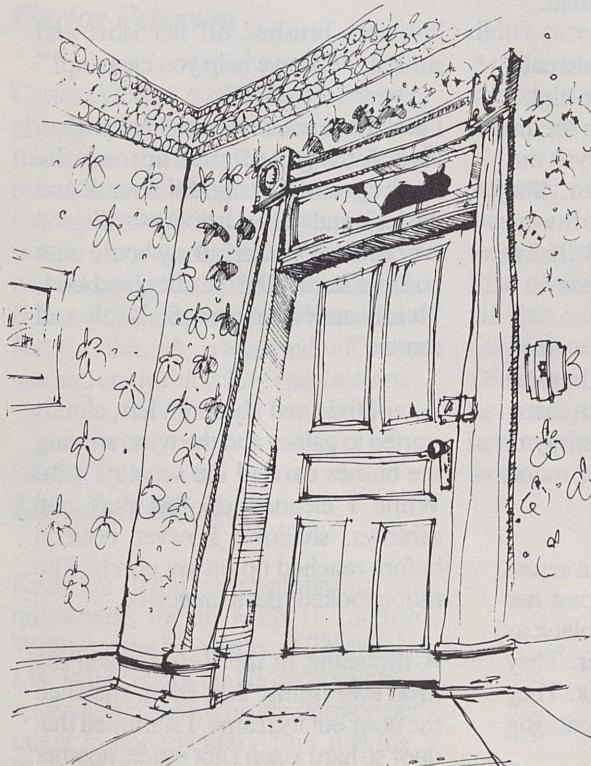
At present, Dee is a surgical technician at Children's Hospital. Her goal is to become a full-time working artist.





Friends used to pester me about fixing that transom over my front door. But that broken glass had special memories for me. You see, when I was a child, momma had some words with daddy. When daddy slammed the door on his way out, he cracked the glass. When momma threw her shoe after him, she broke a hole straight through the transom. Next morning they was grinning like loons, and they never did get the window fixed.

The outside of my house was kind a interesting, too. For one thing, there was no front steps leading up the hillside through all the hydrangea and the bridal wreath and lilac and bush honeysuckle and what all else got so tall I could just barely see the woods across the alley. Momma said this man, Harry Golightly, built this house



THE BROKEN CAT GLASS

by Kamilah Bilal

for his wife all by his self. The front steps was going to be the final touch, the coupe de grace, or whatever. When Golightly's wife died, that poor man never finished, and my daddy never bothered.

For a couple years now, it's been me and Obadiah, my bulldog, and one or two sweetie pies living up here. The last one wrote nice notes and brought me flowers. Wasn't my fault he was already married to some toot-fruity with jet black hair, who dressed funny and wouldn't let him loose.

Chester was tall, not a bit of flab on him, and handsome. I'd been seeing him, oh, about six months. He fixed my faucets and hinges. And he put in new window glass . . . cept I wouldn't let nobody mend the transom.

My lady friends came over almost every week. In the summer, we sat out on the front porch. Judy and Cora sipped beer. Dixie nursed this little flask she always brought. Johnnie Mae and I drank our lemonade straight.

Toward the end of summer, when the catalpa seeds could be smoked

and wild grapes made the air smell sweet, I had the rattan rocker. Dixie and Cora was on the glider. Johnnie Mae always sat on the rush-seated, ladder-back chair. Judy liked the little bench from the kitchen. And Dixie brought this stranger.

"This here's my friend Hyacinth from the job," I remember Dixie saying. "She seemed real interested in meeting you all after I told her about the fun we has."

This new person, this Hyacinth, sat on the floor leaning against the railing across from me. She didn't drink or smoke nothing.

As usual, we discussed our love lives. Cora asked about Chester, and I bragged that he was sweeter than ever. I might even a said that being together more often was the only thing that'd make us happier.

It must a been Judy who said something about how strange the moon was looking that night. Then, we got to telling our favorite scary stories. Judy talked about the hook-handed lover's lane lunatic. Johnnie Mae reminded us about the man haunting the valley. He was struck by lightning and had scabs

continued on page 8

continued from page 7

all over his body and just patches of hair on his head. He came out when it rained to snatch folks and eat them.

Dixie talked about werewolves, and Cora went on and on about vampires. About the time that Hyacinth got started, Obadiah started whining and pawing the floor. I shooed him on out into the woods.

Hyacinth had silver rings on every one of her long fingers. Her hair was all tied up in this dark colored bandanna with flowers printed all over it and around the bandanna was a chain of this real old-fashioned, fancy looking silver. Each link had a turquoise about the size of a dime in the center. And she had on this burgundy blouse with baggy sleeves and a black, rawhide vest. The fringe from it hung down near her knees. Her paisley skirt came past her calves, and she wore a belt that was a good five inches wide with a rhinestone buckle. Top it off, Hyacinth had this gold earring hanging from her right ear that looked like a small one of them big round things they be clanging at symphonies.

Well, with all of us sitting out there with nothing but that peculiar moon and my yellow porch light, her eyes looked awful big and shiny, and her voice kind a floated out over us:

There was a woman of deep and boundless passion. Her name was Hanmiyyah. Her parents were a travelling people. Moving often. And, when Hanmiyyah was 14, they say she left her parents to marry a much older man. This man taught Hanmiyyah much in the way of love making, much about the art of pleasing a man. But from him Hanmiyyah never learned to give her heart. And the old man died, they say, and he left her a small treasure. Silver, they say it was, and some gold, and some precious stones and paper money.

Hanmiyyah went out into the world. Many men were grateful for her companionship. They found rapture with Hanmiyyah for she was very good to them, but she could not fully give herself to any man. Not until she met Stefen Aimes. Stefen Aimes, they say, was a tall and striking man. Well assembled and soundly built. Skillful with his hands. His gentleness attracted Hanmiyyah. And Stefen Aimes enjoyed the fullest blessings of Hanmiyyah's generous heart.

She was to him like a slave. His glance was a great reward. His touch a treasure to Hanmiyyah. His words glorified the love-driven woman's soul. But Stefen Aimes found that his heart was moved by a girl they say was called Emily. So Stefen Aimes and his Emily left the town one day, and they say he never even bid goodbye to Hanmiyyah. They say his leaving Hanmiyyah like that drove the woman mad.

At first, Hanmiyyah was heard calling for Stefen Aimes in the night. Her voice climbing through the air like a clawing cat. Hanmiyyah did not tarry long in the town. She always carried this dagger. It was, they say, as long as her hand. Thick at the hilt and dull at the point.

At first, there were tales of women named Emily found with their hearts slashed out. Then, any woman they claim Hanmiyyah came across under a blood moon died the same way.

They say her hair streams out across her shoulders way down past her waist, and it's still as coal black as when the old man took her. They say her eyes glow in the dark. They say at night she becomes a cat. Big and black like a panther.

Hanmiyyah still wanders the back-roads and woodlands looking for Stefen Aimes. They say it is the unsatisfied love that keeps her soul from resting. Nothing can restrain her.

That's what they say.

I swear, the only thing I heard after Hyacinth stopped talking was the smoke rising from Judy's cigarette. Even the crickets quit chirping. We was dumbfounded.

"I never heard one like that before," Dixie said. Her flask was empty. "Tell us another one."

Johnnie Mae coughed and Cora checked her watch.

"Jesus! I didn't know it'd got so late. I think I better get going."

"Here, I'll walk with you."

"Don't leave without me."

Hyacinth brushed off her skirt and smiled. "Can we help you clean up?"

I told them not to worry. That's when Hyacinth gazed out across the hydrangea and the bridal wreath and the lilac and the bush honeysuckle and everything else that hid my house with no front steps from the alley, and said, "It is beautiful up here. So lovely and remote."

After Dixie and Hyacinth left, clouds started to gather and the wind stirring the bushes carried the scent of rain. While I cleaned up the cans and ashtrays, shadows I never noticed before reached up on my porch. The moon looked like a tangerine.

A thrashing in the weeds made me drop everything. Just about snatched the door out its frame. I slammed that door so hard when I got inside, another piece of that transom glass fell out.

continued on page 9



**Illustrations by
Carlos Peterson**

Carlos Peterson is a Pittsburgh creative photographer and a technical as well as fine artist who attended Conley Vocational School, Allegheny Community College and the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He recently took first place in two categories in the 1987 Atlantic Life Insurance Company Afro-American Art Exhibit. He is married with one son and enjoys bicycling and camping.

**Story by
Kamilah Bilal**

Kamilah Bilal is completing requirements for an MFA in English Writing at the University of Pittsburgh. Ms. Bilal creates documentary photo-essays and plans to further develop her talent in documentary film making. She is the mother of two daughters.

Then, something outside hit the door, and I fell over the wing chair. Picking myself off the floor. I looked up at the hole in the transom. It looked like a cat up there. Suddenly, I heard all this whining and scratching and, honey, I cleared a path through all that dusty old stuff I'd been stacking and storing, and I buried myself so deep in my bed I didn't think I'd be able to find my way out.

You know, it might've been Obadiah out there, but I wasn't budging unless something else moved first. I didn't care how full my bladder got. And, next morning, there was these strange scratches and stains on my door.

Anyway, the next time my lady friends was over, they were surprised to see them hydrangea and bridal wreath and lilac and bush honeysuckle and what all else cut down. They oohed and aahed about the new window transom. Dixie kept wondering why Hyacinth never came back. And the rest of them never asked about Chester. Never again.

Feeling the Darkness

"... over the land of Egypt there may be such intense darkness that one can feel it."

Exodus 10:21

I pet the sable night,
fingering its blackish fur—
soft to my touch,
hardbodied underneath.

My eyes stroke sky,
touching burnt cork face—
no response returns,
only icy lightlessness.

The evening stalks my body,
a heartbeat can be felt—
as midnight approaches,
it pounces on my ebony soul.

—Fr. Benedict Auer, O.S.B.
Marmion Abbey



TRUE OR FALSE

S P O O K I E S

1. Po John, he dreamt 675 and played it for three days. It hit on the fourth. Shouldn't Po John have kept it up and played until he won?
2. To dream the number 413 or 127 means you dreamed about death, and 769 means dead.
3. People trying to command respect are wasting their time, right?
4. Wantin' some money, and needin' some money is two different things?

M A G I C A L

5. What are one of the basic concepts of magic?
6. What is the difference between the magician and the scientist?
7. What does it take to move a desired and loved recalcitrant to you?
8. What is a Talisman and Amulet?

W O N D R O U S

THOUGHTS FROM OL' FOLK

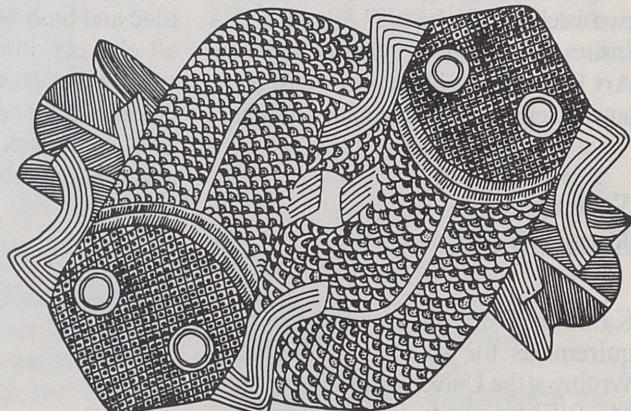
9. A basket-trap is for holding fish; but when you has the fish, you needn't think about the basket. Words are for holding ideas; but when you has got the idea, one needn't think no moe about the word.
10. Some teachings are of no practical use to a body. It's only those who know the value of the useless, can be talked to about the useful.
11. If there be a beginning, there musta been a time before the beginning began. If there be a time before the beginning began, there musta been a time, before the time began the beginning began.

If there is a beginning, there must also be a not-being. If there be a time before there began to be any not-being, there musta also been a time before the time before there began to be any not-being.

So here I sit talking about being and not being, but I still don't know whether it is being that does not exist and not-being that really exists. And I don't know worth a damn, if

I've said something that means anything or said nothing that has any meaning at all.

13. Confucius said: 'Hold fast to it and you can keep it, Let go, and it will stray.
For its comings and goings it has no time nor tide;
None knows where it will bide.'
14. Lines from Magical, Wondrous and Spooky Books. Do any of these ring a bell?
 - A. That was all he had to say. He stopped right there. Just like Dirty Red not to finish something. That woulda taken too much of his strength as they could.
 - B. He called his last major work a "Commedia," because he'd written it in Italian, a style removed from "tragic" Latin, and because it progressed from a dark beginning to redemption and hope. A later generation added the word Divine—that is, dealing with the nature of superhuman excellence.
 - C. 'In all the days that she was growing up, signs failed not, but none heeded.'
 - D. 'He was not interested in the snow.' Seargent blinked. When he looked up the snow fell in his eyes. Then he looked right where he was—in front of a church... He tried the handle. Locked. He put his shoulder against the door and his long black body slanted like a ramrod.
 - E. 'I'm tired... Huh!... Hungry... Uh!... I'm sleepy... Huh! I'm cold... I got to sleep somewhere,' Seargent said.
 - F. 'To give anyone the running feet: Take sand out of one of his tracks and mix the sand with red pepper; and throw some into a running stream of water and...'



ANSWERS: See page 22



Wonderful, Wonderful, And Yet Again Wonderful...

Amos Tutuola, The Brave African Huntress, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1958, 150 pages. Reissued by Grove Press in 1970.

"Oh wonderful, wonderful, and yet again wonderful..."

Shakespeare wasn't praising *The Brave African Huntress* when he wrote this, but he might have been. No balmy midsummer night's dream, Amos Tutuola's fourth novel is a sub-Saharan journey into a jungle wilder than nightmare. Adebisi, the African huntress, tells her own story of inheriting her father's hunting profession and venturing into the Jungle of the Pigmies to rescue her "four senior brothers." It is a story of courage, family loyalty and violence, a fabulous rite of passage of a girl whose desire leads her far beyond the role of the women, and the men, of her village. Adebisi knows this is a tale of transformation: "I had become wild at the same moment that I had put on the hunting dress and juju."

As in any action-adventure, the stakes are high (saving her brothers) and the threats to her life severe. Tutuola is a master at crafting suspense. The action sequences are told in a rapid-fire narrative that reads like the shooting script of a Spielberg thriller—full of quick cuts, jumps between stillness and sudden action and near-miraculous escapes. Adebisi's antagonists are bizarre and believable at the same time: Odara, owner of the poisonous cudgels and "cyclops of the semi-jungle" whose aura is a wind that forces tree tops to the ground; the Gatekeeper of the Jungle who commands, "Come

THE BRAVE AFRICAN HUNTRESS

Review by
Jane Todd Cooper

lay your head on this rock and let me cut it off right now;" the "snake of snakes," a boa who almost squeezes her to death; stern pigmies; a forest burglar; even a town of bachelors. Often frightened and desperate, Adebisi perseveres through impossible challenges, fueled by her promise to find and free her brothers. Although she is cunning and bold, her real bravery and strength grow from family loyalty. What a wonderful moral for any youngster or adult. For those who are seeking what Maya Angelou calls "sheroes" for themselves or the young girls they love, Adebisi is a worthy and appealing protagonist.

But *The Brave African Huntress* is more than an adventure. As a rite of passage in true Nigerian oral tradition, it is a wondrous, episodic story of rebirth whose symbols and signs are woven into the fabric of the narrative so subtly, it is impossible to separate them from their context. For example, when Adebisi returns to the Village of the Pigmies after she has destroyed it with fire, a rock slide blocks her way out. Trapped in the valley of a ghost town, doomed to death by starvation, she plots her escape with the help of an unwilling gorilla. For an American reader, this is a hilarious about-face of the old King-Kong story in which the girl is saved from sure-death in the

beast's hand. But for Adebisi it seems a rebirth out of the pit of despair and destruction she herself has caused. Readers who like allegorical moralities such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, may interpret each episode of this tale as a moral of human experience without slowing the roller-coaster action of the adventure.

Most wondrous to the student of literature may be *Brave African Huntress*'s language, a pidgin English whose structure is flexed to accommodate a world-view that does not demand (as English does) cause/effect relationships between events but rather accepts the marvelous as an aspect of everyday life. This is the language of poetry that draws the reader into the astounding merger of the structure of one language with the content of another, that risky fault line from which a charged language emerges, a language which, while apparently familiar, is full of new twists and revelations. Think of Nabokov thinking in Russian, Lithuanian,

continued on page 22

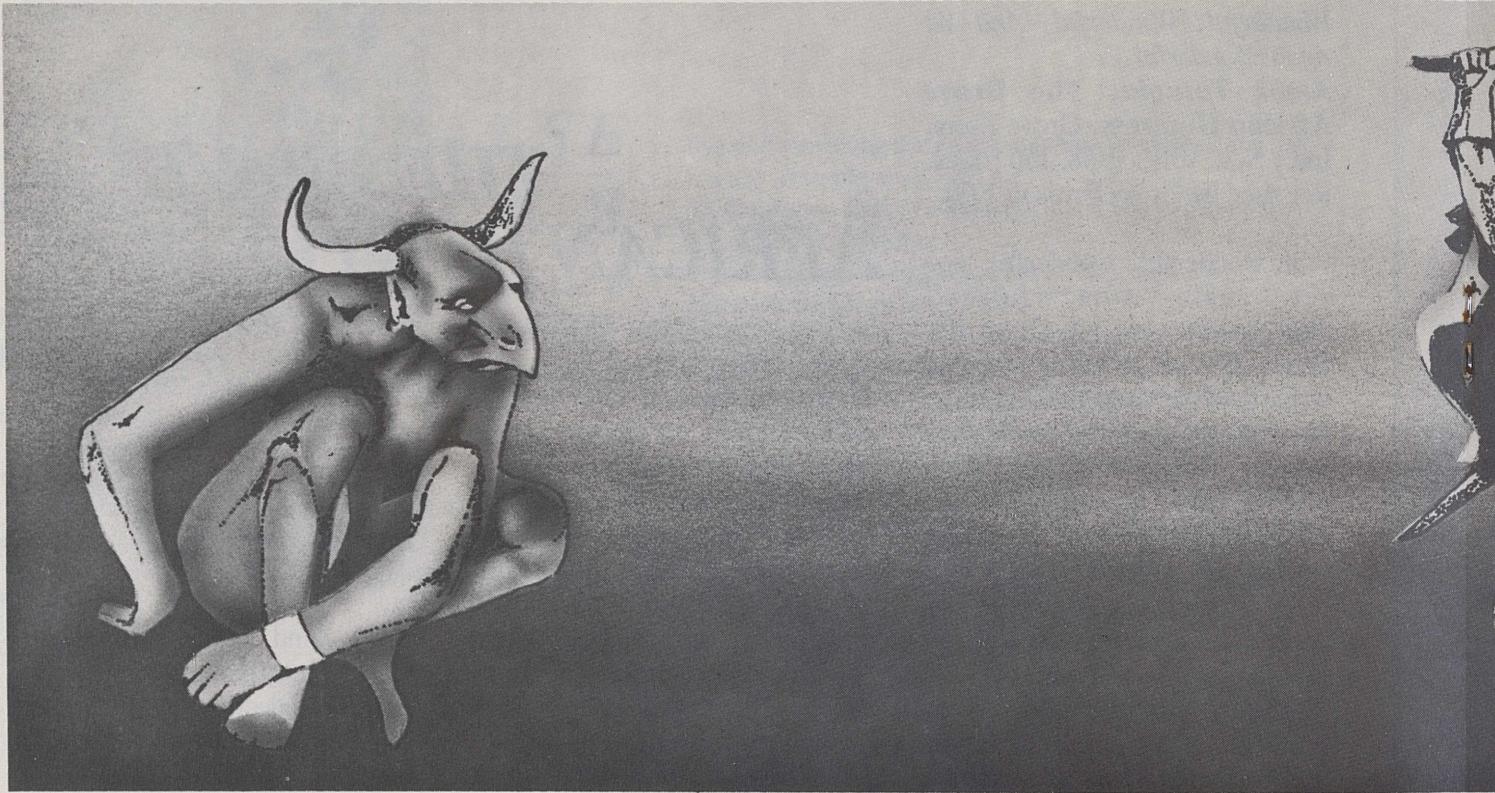
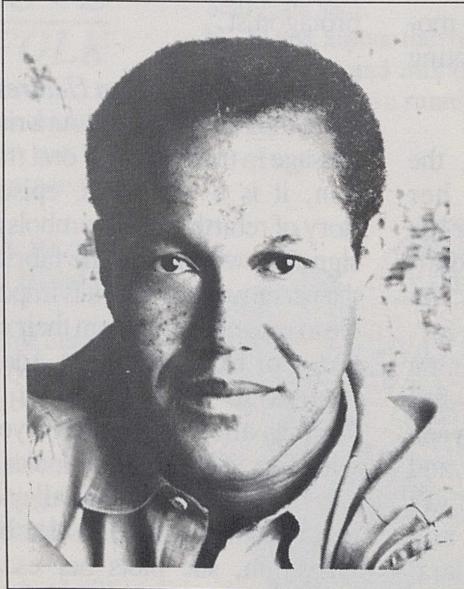


Illustration by Waitmond Vire

In addition to his talent as a poet and essayist, Gilbert Moses is an award-winning stage, film and television director. His theatrical work includes the Broadway hit *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* and Moses received his first Obie for directing Imamu Amiri Baraka's *Slaveship*.

Moses received a nomination for Best Director of the HBO series *Maximum Security*, and he received an Emmy nomination for television's history-making series *Roots*.

His movies of the week include *The Greatest Thing that Almost Happened* and *A Fight for Jenny* starring Philip Michael Thomas and Leslie Ann Warren.





Minotaur

by Gilbert Moses



(Spoken to a TV camera.)

Like Theseus, I am tying a thread from the eye
to the mind's door
in order to retrace my steps
I will leave images of myself in every room,
and etch hieroglyphs of hope on cinder walls.

The Minotaur is an elusive beast.
His diffracting image mirrors
our own deception in the iris of each mirage.
Trompe-l'oeil of the heart.
[Remembering the viewer.]
Yet there is a larger element of play
in his lethal games.

At the very moment of fingering your own breath—
of giving shape to your own history—
he, secure in his uncontested power,
his forehead fronded with crimson hibiscus,
engages in a demented courtship,
and feints rhythmically like a boxer in circles
around the pulse of the betrothed.

[Repulsing memory.]
I have heard that he scratches his horns along the walls
to throw those who seek him off-track,
and that he shits in indiscernible places.
Right now the floor is crumbling beneath my feet
just as I thought I heard the pawing of hooves above my head.
[Marveling at the beast's ingenuity.]

It would be best to come upon him
while he is dreaming,
his violence blended in the brooding night,
giving time to fully register
the large exquisite head knotted with mud and saliva
the wide asphalt colored lips
hiding malodorous teeth corroded like prison bars,
the hirsute brow caked with empty conceit,
before I, straddling his leathery neck,
saddle the present,
and extinguish death by mutilating the eyes of my own silence.
One sound of victory mingling with the maroon anguish
of the groaning earth will set free
elements of chance of my own choosing.

One eye for my mother incubating secrets
into skin and nails which live unknown to this day.
One eye for my father who left me standing
as a child in the chilled water with nowhere to go
but down the spiralling path of an inner journey
unmarked by stones but with flowers at every turn.

When I stopped to smell the flowers
each petal fell to the ground one by one.
[He mimes the gesture of stabbing.]

I will meet him face to face
before he catches on to my tricks
and gnaws my cable in two.

Part of our African-American cultural heritage includes magical, wondrous and spooky stories from the slavery and Jim Crow years. Fortunately, Richard Dorson collected and preserved many of these fantastic tales. The stories printed here are from Dorson's book titled American Negro Folktales (Indiana University Press). They are reprinted here by permission of the author's daughter, Gloria Dorson.

Farmer's out early breaking his land in February, he wants to get good subsoil. Well, he's plowing along, and he plowed up Mr. Snake, a great big one. Mr. Snake was in a quirl where he'd quirled up for the winter, you know; he was cold and stiff. Farmer stopped and looked at him, says, "Well I declare, here's Mr. Snake this time of year." Mr. Snake says, "I'm cold, I'm about froze to death. See how stiff I am, I can't even move. Mr. Farmer, would you put me in your bosom and let me warm up a bit? I'm cold."

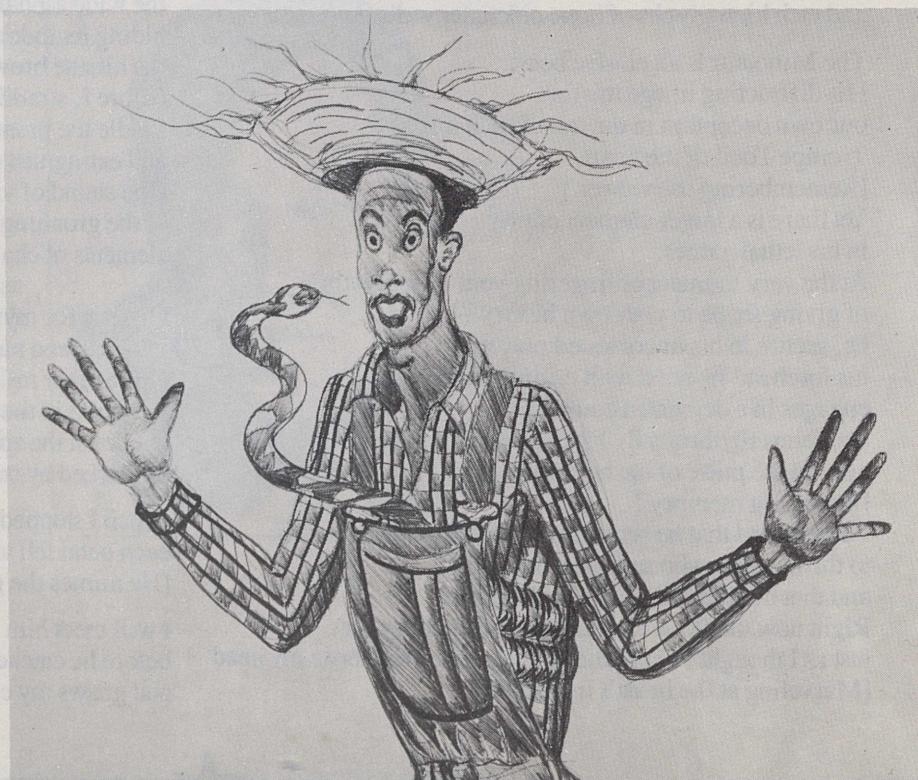
Farmer says, "Noooo. You're a snake, I can't fool with you, you might bite." He said, "No, I wouldn't bite you for nothing in the world. Do you reckon I'd bite you after you warm me up?" He talked so pitiful Mr. Farmer decided he'll warm him in his bosom. So he stoops down to pick up Mr. Snake, and puts him in his bosom. Well, he tells his horses, "Git up," gets his plow, and goes back to work.

About nine o'clock he unbuttoned his shirt, looked down in his bosom. "How do you feel, Mr. Snake?" Mr. Snake says, "I feel pretty good, I'm warming up considerably." He buttoned his shirt up, goes on and plows till about ten-thirty. Unbuttoned his bosom, looked at it, says, "How do

THE FARMER AND THE SNAKE

you feel, Mr. Snake?" "Oh, I'm feeling pretty good. Ain't you feeling me moving around? I can move now." The farmer says, "Yes, I'm glad you feeling better, feeling warm." Well, he plows till about fifteen minutes to twelve. He said, "Well, I'll go down to the other end and put Mr. Snake down." He could feel him moving around quite spirited like, so he didn't bother to unbutton his bosom at all. After a while when he got near the other end, he was going to take him out and go on to dinner. He kinda looked down and the snake done stuck his head out and was looking right in his face and sticking out his tongue. (A snake wants to fight then, you know, when he sticks out his tongue.) Farmer says, "Now, Mr. Snake, you said you wasn't going to bite me; you said after I warmed you up you wouldn't bite me." Snake says,

"You know I'm a snake, Mr. Farmer." "Yes, but you said you wouldn't bite me." Mr. Snake said, "Now you know, Mr. Farmer, I'm s'posed to bite you." So he bit the farmer in the face. The farmer goes home, tells his wife how he carried Mr. Snake in his bosom and got him good and warm; then Mr. Snake bit him. Said, "Don't care what a snake says, you don't never take one in your bosom to warm him up. For when he gits warm he will bite." In the end Mr. Farmer lay down and died.



MAKING THE NEGRO JUMP

This happened up at Corning, Arkansas. A Negro was passing through there. It was cotton picking time, but no Negroes lived there, and weren't allowed there. They didn't want to pick this Negro up and make him go to picking cotton. So one big white man walked out to the railroad as he was walking by, with a pistol in one hand and a quirt in the other. So he called him over, told him to come over. Said, "Don't you know we don't allow no niggers through here?"

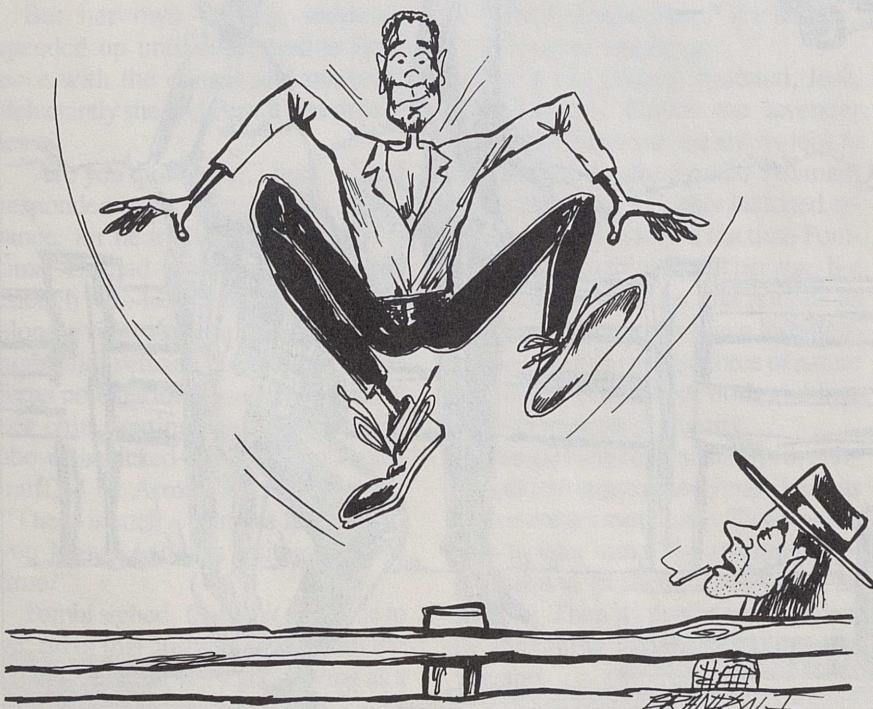
He said, "No, Boss, I didn't know it."

He said, "I'm not going to kill you, I'm just going to whip you, and make you remember this place so you don't ever come through here again." And he said, "Well, before I whip you, I'm going to see if you can jump this fence." He had a six foot fence there,

and he told the Negro, he says, "Now when I tell you to go over this fence," he say, "you go over. And when I say 'Back again,' you jump back on this side." He said, "Now if you attempt to run, I'm going to kill you." So he drilled him on it. "Have you got it now? When I say 'Over,' you jump over. And when I say 'Back again,' you come back and don't touch that fence. And when I say 'Halt,' you stop."

So they got started. He said, "Over." The Negro jumped over. He said, "Back again." The Negro jumped back. "Over. Back again. Over. Back again." And as the Negro was jumping back again he hollered "Halt," and caught him right up over the fence. So the Negro knew the white man meant for him to do what he had told him to do. The poor Negro just had to hang up there in the air over the fence.

—E.M. Moore



THE YEARLING

In the old days the only things the slaves got good to eat is what they stole. Old Marster lost a yea'ling, and some of the preacher's members knewed its whereabouts. So Old Marster told him to preach the hell out of the congregation that Sunday, so that whosomever stole the yea'ling would confess having it.

The preacher got up and per-nounced to the crowd: "Some of you have stole Old Marster's yea'ling. So the best thing to do is to go to Old Marster and confess that you stole the yea'ling. And get it off right now. Because if you don't, Judgment Day, the man that stole the Master's yea'ling will be there. Old Marster will be there too, the yea'ling will be there too—the yea'ling will be staring you in the face."

John gets up and says to the preacher, "Mr. Preacher, I understand you to say, Judg-ment Day, the man that stole Old Marster's yea'ling will be there, Old Marster will be there, the yea'ling will be there, yea'ling will be staring you in the face."

Preacher says, "That's right."

John replied then, "Let Old Marster git his yea'ling on Judgment Day—that'll be time enough."

—William Brown Lee

continued on page 16



(continued from page 15)

THE NEW DANCE STEP

Morehouse, Missouri, was a big sawmill town on Little River. Every time a colored fellow come through they made him dance and run—the young white fellows did, eighteen to twenty-one. These two colored boys come along, and they made them dance, and then chuck rocks at 'em and run 'em out of town. One of the white fellows, John, was in the bunch, told me they was the best dancers he ever saw. They were gone about five or six months. One day the same two boys come back along there. John said to the gang, "Here come the same two, let's make them dance again today." "Boys, I want you to dance some for me today."

They says "Okay," just sets their suitcases down. And the white fellows begin to pat for them (to make the music). They done all kinds of dancing. After awhile one of 'em stopped, said "Did you ever see that step, Get Your Gun?"

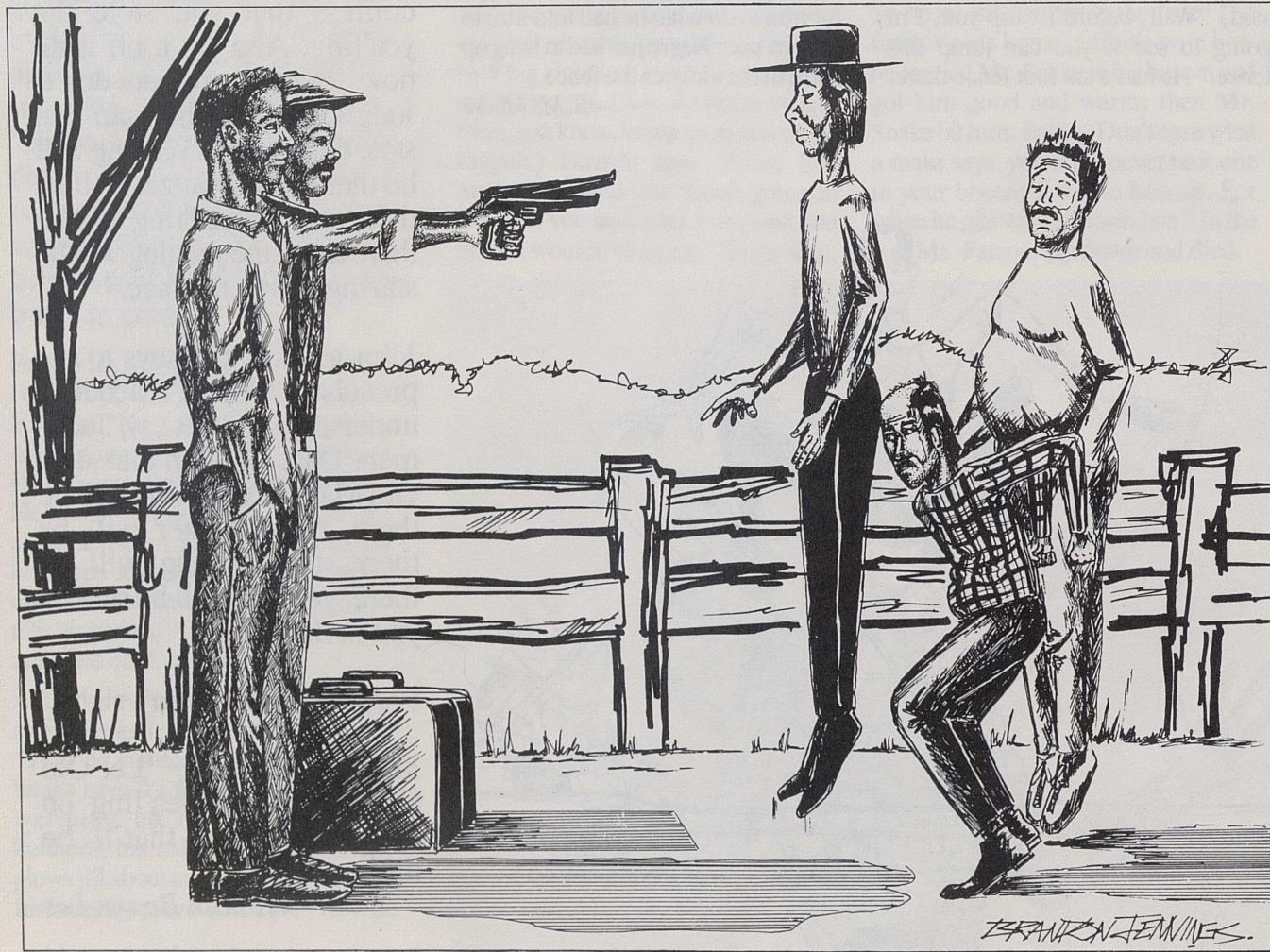
He said, "No."

The colored boy said, "If we had our light shoes on we'd show you something. That beats any step we know."

They said, "Well get your light shoes out; we sure wants to see that."

They went to the suitcases, unlocked it, retched in like they was going to get the shoes. Both of 'em come up with a gun at the same time. Said, "Now let's see you all dance." John said none of them couldn't dance at all. He said they just made them jump up and down for forty minutes till they couldn't get their feets hardly off the ground. Said then they just picked up their suitcases, said "That's pretty good, boys," and walked off.

And they never did bother nobody after that.





Pombidora didn't leave the party until her pains were three minutes apart. She knew from her other times there was no need to hurry. Why be in a hospital ward with pinch-nosed nurses and tight-mouthed doctors when she could be here at José's and Felicia's enjoying herself? All night she had been feasting and joking and easing her pains with the very good rum Felicia brought home from her employers', getting up from time to time to sway in a majestic samba while the child rocked gently inside her.

But her own rhythm suddenly speeded up until it seemed to keep pace with the congas and maracas. Reluctantly she told Pepe it was time to leave.

"Are you quite sure?" her husband responded with even greater reluctance, for he too was having a good time. He had swallowed more than enough rum for a full-sized man, let alone a runt. And he had danced all night with Felicia's cousin Amalie, his ferret nose buried between her breasts, her chin floating regally ten inches above his slicked-down hair. In a voice muffled by Amalie's chest, he said, "There is such a thing as false labor, you know. Are you quite sure it is time?"

Pombi sighed, feeling it was time to get rid of this husband just like all the others. Pepe earned a good living as a

BROWN GARDENIAS

by Kristin Hunter

courier, such a good living that she sometimes had suspicions about the contents of the parcels he delivered, though she never questioned him. He was generous to her sons Louis and Tito, who were now sleeping head to foot on a cot in Felicia's kitchen. But he simply was not enough man for her. No earthly man could be, of course. And, of course, sometimes she did not need the care and protection which Pepe denied her because she was so big he assumed she was strong. But there were times when her spiritual lord and protector had other business to attend to, and then she was as needy of tenderness and care as any other woman. This was one of those times.

"I asked, are you sure?" Pepe repeated ungraciously.

"Yes, I'm sure, Pepe," she said.

"Bring me my things."

But it was Felicia's husband, José, who brought Pombi the lavender plastic overnight bag she always took to the hospital and the Size 20 Tall man-made mink that no longer buttoned except at the top. Most of the time Pombidora did not think about her size, but now, looking at Pepe and Amalie as they danced, she felt like a looming, shadowing mountain, a force of nature that could crush them both and lose none of its mass or dignity.

The girl danced vacant-eyed, staring off into space above Pepe's head as if he were not even there. That was the way to take him. The mountain approved and let them dance out of its shadow. Then its depths were shaken by something like the rumbling of a volcano.

José saw. "I'll take you in my taxi," he volunteered.

"Have it quickly," Felicia called gaily. "Maybe you can be back before the party's over."

"Have a big healthy son for me," Pepe said without turning to look at her.

Pombidora opened the door of Felicia's hall closet and bobbed her head at the colorful, cluttered alter there. She crossed herself before the image of St. Mary Magdalene and dipped her fingers into the fount of holy water and the pots of red peppers and black beans. Then she closed the door and moved, silent and stately, to the vestibule, where she kissed her fingertips, stooped and touched them to the little shrine dedicated to her other husband. She was rewarded instantly with a tingling warmth in her fingers that spread energy to all of her body. She straightened. She was ready.

"It will be a big, healthy daughter. For me," she answered Pepe without looking back.

"Maybe you should forget him, you know?" José said, hunched ferociously over the wheel of his taxi, attacking the deserted midnight streets as if they were full of daytime obstacles.

"I already have," she said, the final

continued on page 18

(continued from page 17)

'v' ending in a squawk as he lurched around a pothole.

"Sorry," José said, as if he could help being a taxi driver any more than she could help being in labor. "You could get another man."

"I don't know. I'm so big."

"So? Get a big man."

"I'm big and ugly."

"Bull shit. You're a woman," José said with an angry swerve around nothing. "A woman is never ugly. Here we go."

The pains were much closer when he squealed on two wheels into the emergency entrance and fell on his horn as if to announce, "Here is an emergency the likes of which you have never seen! Here is your chance to prove you can deal with a real emergency!"

"Thanks, José," she told him after prying him loose from the horn and persuading him she could walk unassisted into the hospital. "I hate having the police bring me. The police are too scared. They can't tell the difference between a person in pain, a crazy person or a dangerous person."

"Them? Those creatures? No, of course they don't know the difference," he said, following with her bag.

Various uniformed egg-faced creatures appeared to take charge of Pombidora. José handed her rosary and a small leather pouch. "Felicia said to give you these. You know your brats will be OK with us—that goes without saying. And we'll be back to check on you as soon as we can chase all the riff-raff out of our place."

"Hide the liquor. That'll get rid of them," Pombi told him. Then, as a contraction clenched like a fist inside her, her grin became a grimace. Her head swimming, she addressed the uniforms in a strange mixture of politeness and profanity. "Will you fuckers kindly move my ass into the delivery room? Please pardon my frank mouth but this is an urgency. Ask your mama what it feels like if you don't believe me. If you will excuse my

Portuguese this little bitch is pulling me apart in her hurry to get into your hideous world. Why the hell the hurry I don't know but that's the way it is. So please if you don't mind please fucking *please* get a move on. Thank you."

"We'd like to, Mrs. Gomez, but there is a problem," one of the uniformed egg-faces said.

"You will have a worse problem if my water breaks on this floor and drowns you all, I promise you. Ayeee!"

"Try to hold it back a little while longer, Mrs. Gomez," another egg said. "The maternity ward is full. We can't find a space for you."

Before Pombidora could frame a juicy answer to that one the uniformed egg behind the desk put the phone down and shouted, "Doctor Littleman said to take her over to E Wing, E 21. He'll meet her there."

The egg faces pursed their mouths into O's. "E Wing! But that's for private patients."

For rich white Leghorns dropping white eggs, Pombidora translated, reading the O's.

"I said get her up there!" the admissions clerk yelled. "That's what he told me! And hurry! He just delivered three and has four more in a holding pattern."

"What the hell happened nine months ago?" a black attendant wondered aloud. "A blackout?"

"A blizzard," José said, smiling. "I should remember. I drive a taxi, you know? I was stuck in traffic five hours, when I could have been home having fun like everybody else." He waved to Pombidora as she was helped into the elevator. "Go have your baby in style, Pombi. Queen it over everybody else like you're supposed to."

E Wing was certainly nothing like the lively, crowded charity ward. The first thing that Pombi noticed was the quiet. Except for soft mushy music playing in the background, there were no sounds. And, instead of a couple of rows of beds, only four to a room.

Pombi liked the pastel walls and

plush rugs and hanging plants. Didn't like the silence, but she soon fixed that.

"Try to hold back till the doctor gets here, Mrs. Gomez," the E Wing nurse said, as if she contained a recording from the master tape downstairs.

"I'm not holding back anything," Pombidora said. "It is time for this child to be born. Aiyehee! Doc-toorrr!"

There was not time for the doctor to get there. There was not even time to wheel her into the delivery room. They did it anyway, for some stupid hospital-rule reasons, but Pombidora's fine daughter, nine pounds with a thick mat of black hair, was already being held above the crib-sided table on which her mother rolled. "You see how dumb these fuckers are, Montanita?" she told her baby. "They put the mother and not the child in the crib. They take us to the delivery room *after* you are born." Montanita, Pombi had already named her, for herself. Felicita, she added for her best friend. Happy little mountain. Already the baby was smiling at her mother's jokes. The doctor arrived, the cord was cut with great ceremony, and various scrubbings and swabbings were done with equal solemnity, to make the hospital seem important enough to serve a force of nature.

"Next time," Pombi said clearly, "I shall stay at the party with my friends." She was happy to see her daughter raise her shoulders and turn her head at the sound of her voice. Already she possessed the alertness and strength of a three-month-old. "We must be patient with this place, Montanita. It tries to justify itself because it has no purpose." Pombi winked at Montanita, and the baby winked back before they wheeled her mother back to E21.

"Why are they separating us?" Pombi protested. "I want my baby with me!"

"Plenty of time for that later," said the pusher who was wheeling her. "Right now you need rest."

"Rest! What for? I am not tired. I feel fine. And Montanita is certainly not tired. She has been riding free for

nine months."

As they turned the corridor a dough-faced girl with hair chemically frizzed in tendrils tight as Pombi's was walking up and down, groaning, holding her husband's hand.

"Why is he here?" Pombi wanted to know.

"To assist his wife," was the answer.

"Pah!" she spat. "What assistance can he give?" But something inside her clenched into a knot, as if the labor were beginning again—necessary of course to expel the afterbirth and pull her insides back together, but stimulated by envy. Pepe, dancing with Amalie, flashed before her eyes. "Idiot!" she said loudly. "You spread your legs with him at the beginning. At the end, you do it alone."

The nurse who had asked her to hold back hurried over to reprove her. "Mrs. Gomez, please. Even if you're not tired, some of the other mothers are."

"Of course. They are all weaklings here except me," she muttered as she rolled onto her bed. She felt like dozing off, but stubbornly stayed awake. Directly across from her, a blonde beauty lay in lace-edged tiers of white satin like a bridal gown, her hair spread in equally beautiful tiers on the pillow.

"Did you bring a nightgown, Mrs. Gomez?"

"Yes," she said. Then she thought of the blue-faded-to-gray tent stuffed in her purple bag. It was OK for the ward—where everyone wore such things, but here—"My husband bought me the best. It is a very fine silk one. I wouldn't want to stain it. I want to save it for later," she said, and accepted the rough hospital gown, which of course went on backwards, like everything else in this place.

Sleeping Beauty opposite Pombi was awakened by a kiss from Prince Charming, bouquet of white roses in hand. He was a very charming prince of a husband, with blue eyes and black lashes, tenderly stroking his wife's hair and plumping her pillow and arrang-

ing the flowers he had brought her.

Until February, when the baby was conceived, Pombidora had flowers whenever she wished for them. Dark red velvety roses, as many as she wanted, would sprout from her fingertips, and their perfume would surround her even after she had cut them and put them in a vase. They made Pepe jealous and suspicious that she had another man, which was of course true in a way. Since her pregnancy, though, her fingertips had been barren, all her energy going to the great rose growing inside her. This of course made Pepe happier, less jealous, finally less attentive and more careless with women like Amalie. The less attentive he became the angrier Pombi had grown. It was dangerous to make her angry.

"I wouldn't want a white baby, myself," she said aloud, clearly. "They're born old and wrinkled, a lot of them. They die of old age, sometimes, in the first few days."

Two pairs of china blue eyes stared at her in horror. She shut her eyes, pretended to be asleep, and soon was.

When she awoke, it was dusk. The soft mushy music was playing, and in the next bed, another princess, almost as big as Pombidora, was having her back rubbed with an expensively scented lotion. Her husband was doing the rubbing, which took a long time because the back was as broad as a mattress. Pombidora longed for expensive fragrance, and even more for a long luxurious rubbing.

She sat up and declared, "Some of these white babies only weigh four or five pounds. And their mothers gain forty or fifty. Isn't that strange?"

The older black woman who brought Pombi her dinner said, "You hush up your mouth. You make me shamed of myself."

Pombi was amazed by this. "Why should anything I do make you ashamed of yourself?"

"Because you're the only one of our color in here."

"That is not my fault, and what I say

is not *your* fault. Besides, I speak the truth. Can you call me a liar?"

"No," the older woman said. She bent as if to arrange the tray and whispered, "The big one in the next bed, hers was born premature. It's in one of those incubators now."

"You see? I told you I only speak the truth."

"Do you have to speak it so loud?"

"How is my Montanita, my big healthy girl?"

"Raising hell, just like you. Screaming like a fire siren. Rolling and kicking around like a six-month-old. She's a real handful."

"Of course," Pombi said with satisfaction. "She is mine. And she is not white."

"She is not so very black either," the woman said, looking stern again behind her bifocals.

"Oh, she will darken," Pombi said serenely. "Just watch. Even before we leave here. It will start at the edges, the tips of her fingers and her ears."

The older woman agreed reluctantly. "I've seen that happen."

The falsely-frizzed girl who had been walking up and down the corridor with her husband was wheeled in, flattened and snoring, and gently transferred to her bed.

"What did she have?" Pombi asked the dinner-tray woman.

"A boy. Like all the others in this room, except you."

The young husband came in, looking whiter than Death eating a chicken-breast sandwich, and held his sleeping wife's hand. Across her bosom he pinned a corsage of small white orchids.

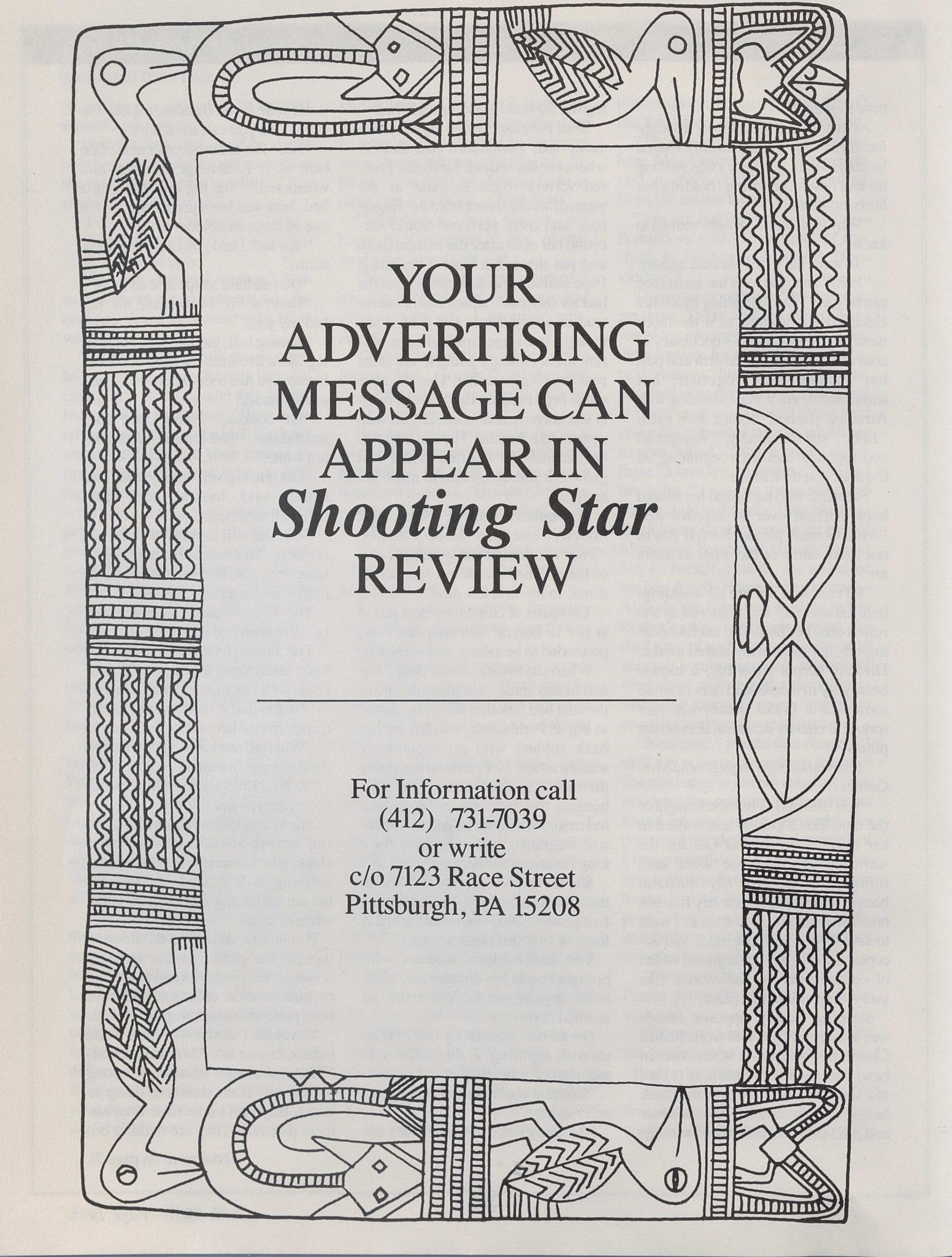
Pombidora dearly loved flowers, though she preferred the strongly scented ones, gardenias and roses. But orchids or even daisies would have been preferable to nothing and no one.

"I wouldn't want one of those white babies, boy or not," she announced.

"There is always something wrong with them. Their stomachs tie up in knots, they don't take their nourishment properly. They are nothing but

continued on page 21





YOUR
ADVERTISING
MESSAGE CAN
APPEAR IN
Shooting Star
REVIEW

For Information call
(412) 731-7039
or write
c/o 7123 Race Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15208

(continued from page 19)

trouble from the day they are born."

"Shut up!" hissed the woman, taking away her tray. "Lord Jesus, please shut her up. Are you a witch, or what, girl?"

"What do you mean? Why are you calling on El Señor to shut me up? I am a woman like you. I proved that yesterday."

"Hush. That one over there, hers was born with a knot in its stomach. They may have to operate on it."

"Then I will pray for it. And for the others too," Pombidora said. Clutching the leather pouch in one hand and her rosary in the other, she got out of bed and walked majestically to the center of the room, the exact spot where the aisles intersected between the four beds, and prayed to her real husband, the one who kept her forever dissatisfied with all mortal men and earthly things. "Forgive me, my Man, and help me," she intoned. "I am an envious, greedy woman, you know that. I can't help it, it's my nature. I want flowers and silk gowns and perfumes too. And I could use someone to hold my hand and rub my back. But you've left me in this world alone, and what am I to do?"

She paused, eyes closed, head cocked in a listening attitude. But she could not hear anything except the transistor radio of the cornsilk-haired princess, who was jerking her bony white shoulders to the beat of a Little Richard song diluted by the Beatles and perverted by a group called The Test Tube Babies and turned upside down by a nameless mechanic at a sound-mixing console.

Pombidora was inspired to preach. "You, you do not know what is happening. Macumba Obeah Santeria is taking over your minds and souls. Yoruba Voodoo from Africa has touched your shores and your pores and is working its way in from the edges." She turned ceremonially to each bed except her own. To the Jew-froed girl she said, "It has taken over your mouth. I hear you when you think I am asleep and you sound Afro with

your talk of funky and hip and down."

She turned to the twitching princess. "It has taken over your ears, entered your soul through your ears, and now it is taking over your body. You are getting spastic, you cannot lie or sit still in your bed, instead you twitch and jerk. Soon you will rise and be ridden." The blonde was on her feet now, doing a jerky dance beside her bed. "You see? Our gods are taking over this country. And about time too. Your gods do not know how to run it. You may think I am putting the bad mouth on you but I am only speaking the truth. And I am a good Christian. I pray also to El Señor Jesus."

Pombi crossed herself and resumed her silent, listening attitude. "Oh all right, I will be quiet. What is it, my Man? You want me to help the unfortunate little ones? But I detest white babies. You know that. It's my nature. I can't help it. After all, you and I are both from Africa." Pombidora jerked as if shocked by electricity, then bowed her head in submission. "Very well, Man, I won't dispute you. You are the Way through whom all must pass. If you open a way for me, I will help them." Pombidora returned to her bed, sighed, closed her eyes, and sniffled. "I am not disputing you, my Love," she murmured. "But all these weak bitches have bouquets and I do not even have one flower. You know how I love flowers. Am I not to have even one flower from that worthless husband you sent me?"

Pombidora pulled a tissue from the box beside her bed to wipe away a tear. In her hand, it turned into a fragrant gardenia. She tucked it behind her ear. She reached into the box again, and another tissue blossomed in her hand. She tucked that one behind her other ear. Greedily she began snatching tissues and putting flowers into her thorny braids. Soon her head wore a crown of gardenias, and the room was heavy with her favorite perfume. "Enough," she could not resist saying, "to disguise the stench of all the dirty white babies in here. Everyone knows

how hard they are to keep clean."

The next tissue she pulled from her box remained just that, a tissue. For a long time after that Pombidora was very still. Finally she whispered, "I will tell Felicia to do some things for you. And when I get out of here, I will give you a ceremony and many fine gifts myself." Her full breasts ached. It was a relief when the nurse brought Montanita to her to nurse.

"Ay, look at my greedy little mountain. She has grown two inches overnight." The child did indeed seem larger. She ate voraciously, sucking with loud satisfaction. Across from her, the awakened Sleeping Beauty cradled a wrinkled, wizened creature that could not even open its eyes. "Ah, what a shame," Pombi said, careful for once to keep her voice low. "The trickster gods have taken her child and given her an old dwarf instead."

"Mrs. Gomez," the doctor said at her side, "there is a space in the ward now."

Pombidora did not look away from her daughter's steady, focused black gaze. "Good," she said. "I don't like being up here with these spoiled, rich bitches and their sickly brats."

"But Mr. and Mrs. Silk would gladly pay your room bill here if you would nurse their boy. She cannot nurse, and mother's milk is just what he needs."

Pombidora started to inform him of the delight she would feel if all white babies starved to death when something fell from her hair. It was a gardenia, turning brown at the edges. She blinked, and it was a wadded, dirty tissue. "All right, my Lord," she said into space.

"Doctor Littleman will be good enough, thank you."

"Did you think I was speaking to you?" Pombi retorted, eyes flashing under the crown of gardenias. "I was making my prayers. I am a good Christian, and I will prove it to you. Yes, bring me the poor creature. Montanita's belly is tight as a conga drum, and I am still so full of milk that it hurts me."

continued on page 23



REVIEW: BRAVE AFRICAN HUNTRESS
continued from page 11

English, French, German, Italian and who knows what else, but writing *olita* or *Ada* in English. Puns, double-entendres, spelling jokes. Now think of a very limited English in which the "little words" (the prepositions, the adverbs) are inverted or misplaced, a simple English with many hair-line fractures through which the mysteries, the magics, the wonders of the universe shine. This is Amos Tutuola's English in the mouth of Adebisi, the brave African huntress.

The Brave African Huntress is out of print and, therefore, difficult to find. Be brave; it is worth the hunt. Six university libraries in Pennsylvania list it: Ursinus College in Collegeville; Allentown College of St. Francis; Millersville University; Shippensburg University; and Beaver College in Glenside. Otherwise ask your local public library to get it through interlibrary loan. In other states, locate it through a public library or at a university with an African studies or African anthropology program. Or try one of the out-of-print book-finders listed in the back pages of *The New York Times Literary Supplement*. If you fail, don't despair. One Tutuola novel, published in 1981, is currently available in the United States through Faber and Faber in Boston. Titled *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*, it is a love saga of a young couple who seek fertility and receive more than they are expecting when the husband, as well as the wife, becomes pregnant. As Calaban said, "Wonderful, wonderful, and yet again wonderful..."



OTHER TUTUOLA BOOKS

Published before

Brave African Huntress:
The Palm Wine Drinkard
My Life in the Bush of Ghosts
Simbi and Satyr of the Dark Jungle

Published after

Brave African Huntress:
Feather Woman of the Jungle
Ayaiyi and His Inherited Poverty
The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town



QUIZ ON PAGE 10

A N S W E R S

1. True. Though the book says play the number for three days, play until it hits, if you can afford to, and if you believe. Dreams are not random thoughts, they have meaning and purpose behind them.
 2. True
 3. True. Respect can't be commanded or demanded. It has to be earned.
 4. True. Wantin' some money is a lazy man's day job.
Needin' some money requires action. So, buy a green candle and don't light it with a match. Dress the candle: Rub money oil over the candle. Start in the middle and work upward, then downward. Dress your body: apply oil to your wrist and rub upward toward body. Chant: I have the power, I have the will. My own destiny I must fulfill. No other man can subdue me. God alone can undo me. Read: Psalms 122 three times.
 5. Nothing occurring in the universe is a random event.
 6. Nada. They both seek similar goals: to vanquish and control nature, and perhaps the mind and body of man.
 7. Strong emotions, conjured and focused with great concentration through a potent spell. Leveled like a bolt of lightning on the subject.
 8. A Talisman and amulet are body adornments, worn for their effect as jewelry as well as for their magical properties. Fringe, tassels, a midi or a shawl. Bad spirits don't like fringe, because it's too distracting for them.
- 14A. *A Gathering Of Old Men* — Ernest J. Gaines
14B. *Dante's Divine Comedy*
14C. *Exodus* by James Baldwin
14D. *Langston Hughes' On The Road*.
14E. *Of Mules and Men*, by Zora Neale Hurston



(continued from page 21)

The little bundle of pink wrinkles was brought to her. It was so feeble it could barely suck, and so disgusting she could not bear to look at it, but nevertheless she coaxed it to feed. "Viejo, viejo, little old man, come on, take some of this milk. It is milk of the gods; if anything can make you strong, it will."

When they took the gnome away from her the big woman in the next bed asked the same favor. "Please?" she begged. "My boy is out of the incubator, but he is very small. We would pay you very well."

"It is not a question of money, you understand," Pombidora said in her most queenly manner. "I am not a cow to be milked for dollars. However, money is always necessary in this strange country of yours."

"Fifty dollars a day?" the woman offered.

It was a huge sum, but Pombidora pretended indifference. "That will be sufficient for now. Later, my price may be higher than you will want to pay." And soon another pink one, this one like a long worm, was taking nourishment from Pombidora's left breast. She reserved the right breast for Montanita, even when the one whose child's stomach was as knotted as its mother's falsely frizzed hair made the same request. She nicknamed him Pretzel, and was not surprised to hear that his stomach pains had ceased after his first feeding.

A very satisfactory routine began. Four times a day the babies were brought to her. And three times a day Pombidora was fed the best the hospital's kitchen had to offer, until she complained that the best was not good enough, after which her evening meals—tender steaks and rare morsels from the sea—were brought in from outside restaurants. Her back was rubbed twice a day with fragrant lotion, and her plaits combed and rearranged by a private-duty nurse. And, though her Kleenex remained Kleenex, the grateful husbands made certain that flowers were always sup-

plied to weave into her braids. Pombidora was living in style; like a queen, as José had said, and furthermore, she was earning one hundred and fifty dollars a day. The other mothers were treating her with proper deference and respect, and their babies were improving—not growing as large as Montanita, of course, who was, of course, a blooming marvel—but the wrinkled one was smoothing out, the wormlike one was filling out, and the knotted one no longer suffered attacks of colic.

During the second feeding of the third day Pombidora noticed something else about the babies that brought her amazement, and then sly amusement. She checked several times to be sure, then began to chuckle and then to roar with laughter and happiness.

That was when Felicia and José appeared in the door.

"That certainly must have been some party," Pombidora observed.

"Sounds like you're having a good time without us," José said. "We could hear you laughing when we got off the elevator."

"And why shouldn't I be laughing? The best of food and accommodations, and I am earning money besides. José, I want you to buy Pepe four boxes of cigars. Felicia, I want you to do the same for—you know, my other husband." Felicia put a warning finger to her lips as Pepe emerged from behind her, looking small and guilty at his tardiness.

But Pombidora welcomed him warmly. "And here is my magnificent husband! Pepe, my darling, come here. See how great a man you are in such a small package. You see? You are the father of quadruplets. Three boys for you, and a girl for me."

Pepe looked baffled. "But they only told me about the girl."

"That was because she was the only one born at the time. The other three came later."

Pepe looked down at her skeptically. "The girl is big and brown and beautiful—like you," he pronounced.

"But these three," he said, pointing to the small mewling ones at her left breast, "they look white."

"Ah, my husband." Pombi laughed, "anyone can tell you have never been a father before. All babies are born pale, after spending nine months in the darkness. But as soon as they reach the light they begin to acquire their true color. They turn brown from the edges inward, like gardenias and cookies and all other sweet things. Look closely here, Pepe, at the fingertips of this long one. See how dark they are? The other two show it more around the tips of their ears. Do you see there, the brown edges? Those ears will not stay pink very long."

The three other mothers of E21 had overheard this lecture, taken one look, and run screaming and weeping into the corridor.

"Why are they all crying?" Felicia wondered.

Pombidora shrugged. "Who knows? They cry because they cry. It is their nature to produce tears just as it is the nature of clouds to make rain. Me, I have better things to do. I have named our daughter Montanita Felicita, Pepe. It is up to you to name our sons."

Pepe, enlarged with self-importance, did not willingly make room for the doctor whose eyes were like sharp needle points. "What's going on here, Mrs. Gomez?"

"Why nothing, doctor. My husband is a father for the first time, and I was just showing him the pigment here—and here—on our sons. Look at these two, their toes are deep tan already. And look at this one, with black eyes that were blue only yesterday. I was explaining this darkening to him, this simple process of nature that occurs after babies of African blood are born. One cannot stop processes of nature, can one, Doctor?"

Doctor Littleman examined the infants with his pocket flashlight, turned paler than Death sucking on a chicken bone, and went out into the hall to consult with the women.

"Mr. and Mrs. Gomez," he said

continued on page 24



when he came back, "you may take your children home today."

"Today? So soon?" Pepe asked.

"Today," the doctor said firmly. "As soon as possible. It would be best."

"Fine," Pombidora said. "Me, I am sick of this place. Tell the newspapers, Pepe. You are now an important man. They pay much money to such important men as the fathers of quadruplets. Then buy two of the biggest bassinets you can find."

Pepe stammered, "But... I mean, I thought... José said you were planning to leave me."

"Pepito, my magnificent one, women in labor say crazy things. No man on earth is quite right for me, but you might as well be the one for a while. Maybe for a long while, if you remember to bring me a flower every day."

He kissed her and left.

Even while he was kissing her, Pombidora's eyes were looking over his head and rolling upward to fasten on a point near the ceiling. After he and their friends were gone, her plum-red lips parted. She patted the leather pouch in her hand and said, "Ah, my Lord, you are truly a jokester. Ah ha, you have earned your reputation as a trickster. Ah ha ha ha, what tricks you play!" Her laughter rippled out into the hall, drowning the weeping of the other mothers from E21, and bouncing the babies who were steadily plumping and browning like oven biscuits at the warmth of her breasts.

Kristin Hunter is the author of eight books of fiction, four each for young people and adults. Among her novels are *God Bless the Child*, *The Landlord*, *The Lakestown Rebellion*, *The Survivors*, and *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*. She is married to John I. Lattany and is a senior lecturer in English at the University of Pennsylvania.

**There was a girl
eight years old they say
her hair in spiky braids
her innocent fist raised in imitation**

**Afterwards, there was a mass of red
some torn pieces of meat
and bright rags fluttering
a girl, once, in a print dress they say**

*Dennis Brutus
from Salutes and Censures*



THEY SAY

They say
"you can't
see the black man
at night"

I wonder...
If that's true...
then,
why,
do I,
see the white man
at noon??

by Louis John Hester-Mitich

***PERHAPS I EXPECT
TOO MUCH OF YOUR
IMMORTALITY***

Lord, George
what have you done:
my disease infected brain
passed down contagious!
Couldn't you have reconsidered, again
the part about all mankind?

The church I go to
has this new bishop
with a past running deep in America:
you once owned one of his relatives.
I look at him:
his eyes reflect only humility,
and still its hard to see
past this cruel vision —
not guilt,
but a touch of your weakness.

Perhaps I expect to much
of your immortality.

And, George, if the bishop's son comes nervous
standing in the doorway for my daughter,
will I feel the same things
of being a father,
or just the nigger past
rising up in my throat?

—R. Blain Andrus

JAS
1987



SHOOTING STAR REVIEW
7123 RACE STREET
PGH., PA 15208-9990

Shooting Stars are physical and emotional wonders.

They leap across vast spaces, dazzling the eye and exciting the imagination. Every Shooting Star travels a unique path.

They carry special qualities to distinct destinies. Nimbly, their essence stimulates our thoughts while enhancing our worlds.

Shooting Star Review
[ISSN 0892-1407] was conceived in the spring of 1985 by Sandra Gould Ford, a marketing specialist, writer and photographer.

This non-profit magazine is designed to increase access to fine literature about the black experience.

Shooting Star Review
offers new as well as classic fiction, poetry, essays and reviews and beautiful illustrations.

Shooting Star Review's **FIRST ANNUAL** **HARVEST MOON** **EVENT**

At the beautiful
Bidwell/Manchester
Craftsmen's Guild
1815 Metropolitan Street
(next to UPS on the North Side)

**Saturday,
October 31, 1987
9 p.m. on**

Costumes Optional
Music by Dale Fielder Quartet
Tickets: \$13
includes free 1 yr. subscription to
Shooting Star Review.

Spend a Magical, Wondrous & Spooky Evening with us!

For information and tickets
call (412) 731-7039