



Issue 22, Vol. 6, No.2

SHOOTING STAR REVIEW

Black Cultural Quarterly
ISSN 0892-1407

Jubilee



\$2



Shooting Star Review

Published quarterly
by

Shooting Star Productions, Inc.
A non-profit corporation that exists ...

*to
employ
the arts
to build
awareness
and appreciation
for
Black
culture.*

Shooting Star Productions, Inc., 7123 Race Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15208

Jubilee Issue

Issue 22 ★ Volume 6, Number 2

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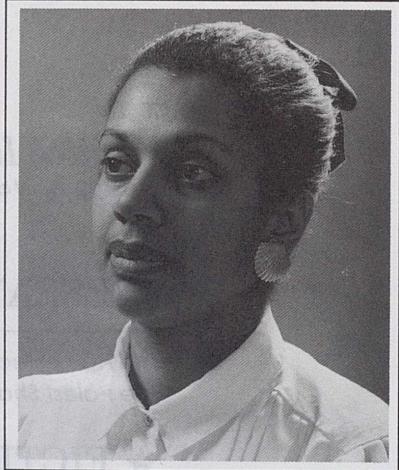
★ COVER ART

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Publisher's Statement

Shooting Star Review

Sandra Gould Ford
Founder & Artistic Director



Jubilee ... an acquaintance recently mentioned that this grand practice extends into ancient Egypt when Pharaohs celebrated the transfer of power. In this country, Jubilees often grew from the celebrations at the end of slavery. In Texas, the festivities were called Juneteenth (on June 19, 1865, Union General Granger stood at the Galveston courthouse and declared the slaves free). In the early 20th century, Juneteenth was the only time Black people could access "whites only" institutions. As Jim Crow replaced Reconstruction, Juneteenth bore the brunt of "separate but equal" stigma, turning a celebration of freedom into reminders of freedom denied.

The poetry, fiction and essays in this *Jubilee* issue were chosen to remind why these celebrations evolved. This issue also seeks to remind that no other people have a right to taint or diminish anything and any way that we acknowledge milestones in our progress as human beings. At this point in our history, the only people who need to appreciate what we produce is our enlightened and progressive selves.

Whether we acknowledge the origins of Jubilee in the dust of the cotton fields or the Nile delta, family and friends all across this nation this summer, we must celebrate ourselves ... again.

A large, handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra". The signature is fluid and expressive, with varying line thicknesses.

The 54th Regiment

They stood, Zulu warriors,
Staring stonily ahead
As if preparing for death
Swords, pistols gleaming at sides.
Uniforms stretched over limbs, trunks.
Hats perched like sun over Mozambique.
Not mules, but regal enslaved Africans
Looking many generations forward.
Ragged backpacks, dull cups
Giants, spirits unbroken, off to fight.
No Abraham Lincoln fought for us.
Lord, they set us free!
Lord, they set us free!

They were heaven sent,
Lord, they were heaven sent
Strong black forefathers
The 54th regiment.

Willie Abraham Howard, Jr.
Atlanta, Georgia



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Shooting Star Review

Jubilee Issue

Volume 6, Number 2

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Single copies are \$2.

One Year Subscriptions are \$10.

Institutional & Business Rate is \$15.

Overseas Airmail is \$28 per year.

Overseas Surface is \$21 per year.

Int'l payments must be in U.S. dollars.

Advertising accepted. Write
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Shooting Star Review
7123 Race St., Pgh, PA 15208
(412) 731-7464



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SSP MISSION

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. exists to build awareness and appreciation for the Black experience via arts and cultural activities.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. provides its services to all racial, ethnic, religious, age and economic populations, with its most specific and immediate work geared toward African-American youth and adults.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc.'s services include:

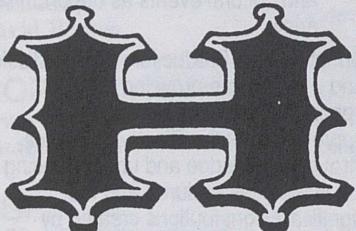
Promoting the arts and artists (literary, visual and performing) whose work explores the Black experience; and

Generating programs consistent with the Mission Statement that develop artistic capacity and cultural breadth. These programs can include production of a literary/cultural magazine, a system of Ceremonies, Commemorations and Conferences (such as Writers Conferences, Middle Passage Commemorations, Jubilee and Kwanzaa Celebrations and Literary Readings), and other arts activities and cultural events as opportunities arise.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc.'s Mission and services are provided so that opportunities exist for greater appreciation of the Black experience through knowledge and understanding of the challenges endured and the significant contributions created by people of African descent. Shooting Star Productions seeks to generate self-understanding and a sense of pride and accomplishment in Black people of all ages and circumstances while providing information and resources that could reduce racial and ethnic intolerance and allow the creative potential of all Americans to be better realized. Further, Shooting Star Productions will expand general interest in and access to the diverse expressions of Black culture.

Where The Light Is As Darkness¹

David Pilgrim, Ph.D.
Big Rapids, MI



**ello, Is this Mr. David
Pilgrim?"**

"Yes."

**"Mr. Pilgrim please
report to St. John's
Medical Center to
begin your
examinations."**

¹ The title is derived from Job 10:22 "A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness."

"When?"

"Tomorrow morning at 7:50. The examinations begin at 8:00. Promptly at 8:00."

"I don't wake up until..."

"You will need to bring birth certificates for every member of your family, at least two family photo albums. Your complete medical and school records, and a valid, pre-1997 driver's license."

"Anything else?"

"Please expect to remain in the testing site for forty-eight hours. Thank you and goodbye."

"Goodbye."

I had expected this telephone call for some time, but the bureaucracy had been intolerably slow -- it had taken them an entire week to get through the O's and there are precious few O'Connells, Osgoods, or any other O's living in Michigan City, Indiana. Yesterday the *News-Dispatch* reported that the P's were being examined, so I knew that I would get my call soon. I handled the call well, unlike most of my friends who whined like three-day-olds. If the truth is ever told, I was calm throughout the "Disaster," as it is called.

"The Russians done made us all niggers! The Russians done made us all niggers, I tell you!"

These were the first words I heard on the morning of January 15, 1999. They were a man's words, and he yelled them repeatedly as I lay somewhere between the sleep world and the real one.

"The Russians done made us all niggers!"

I got out of bed, walked to the window, lifted the sash and shouted some incoherent obscenity at him. He was not deterred: he ran back and forth, pulling his hair, beating his face, and cursing the Russians. He was naked except for a bath robe. A drunken idiot, I thought. I closed the window, walked to the bathroom, peed, returned to bed and tried to sleep.

But there would be no more sleep that morning. More voices -- screaming voices-- came from outside my window: the screams of women, and men, and children. I lay there, torn between wanting to know what was going on and wanting to sleep. Finally, I got up and went to the window.

Near the slide and swing where the neighbors' children play, two men held down a third who struggled to free himself. A woman with a baby pressed to her bosom -- ➤

himself. A woman with a baby pressed to her bosom -- much too tightly -- ran in circles. A fat man beat a car with a baseball bat. Another man chased a woman, and two children chased them. They were all screaming, crying, swearing -- all, that is, except for one old man who sat on the hood of a car scratching his head and laughing.

We've been nuked, I thought. Then there was the sound of screaming and glass breaking in the apartment beneath mine. If we'd been nuked, then why weren't we dead?

"It was them damn Russians, I tell you," yelled the man in the bathrobe.

"It's Armageddon! The world is over!" cried another.

"No. It was them Russians that made me a nigger!"

What was he talking about? Who were these people? Why had they lost their minds?

I had to think. I sat on the edge of the bed, trying to understand what was happening. We've been nuked, I thought. Then there was the sound of screaming and glass breaking in the apartment beneath mine. If we'd been nuked, then why weren't we dead? I heard Phil's voice. He was cursing and crying and breaking furniture. That was too much.

I had to go outside. I grabbed my pants, but I couldn't find my jacket. Then I remembered it was in the bathroom. I hurried to the bathroom. My jacket was lying across the counter. As I grabbed my jacket, my eyes caught the mirror, and then I understood the screams. My skin was jet-black and my hair was woolly as a sheep's.

Holy mercy. I stood there, looking at my reflection. My face was the same. I was the same height, the same weight, and I looked the same except that my light-brown face was now jet-black, and my once-curly hair now kinky. Holy mercy. I looked at my hand; it was black. I looked at my reflection; it showed a very black man. I looked at my hand again, it was still black. I rolled up my pants leg. Yes! My legs were as black as a moonless night. I looked at my reflection again, my hand, my other hand, my feet, and in

the mirror. Jet-black. Even my elbow. Except for the palms of my hands and the soles of my feet, I was completely black.²

"Why Lord? Why?" someone outside yelled.

I ran to the window, now fully awakened. They were all black. I looked into their faces and realized that they were my neighbors, not strangers. They were all very black. And then came the laughter. The more they screamed, and moaned, and yelled, the more I laughed. An uncontrollable laugh came over me.

The thing that had occurred in my apartment complex had also occurred in every home in America. Nobody knows how or why, but every American awakened on the morning of January 15, 1999, with jet-black skin and wooly hair. To say that some people did not take it well would be a huge understatement. We later learned that from January 15-18, there was an average of twenty-three suicide attempts each minute; roughly two-thirds were successful. The United Klan, the Aryan Nation, the Posse Comitatus, the John Birch Society, and other White supremacy groups committed mass suicide rather than live as "mud people."³ A small number of White supremacists -- most notably skinheads and white gangs in Chicago and Boston -- went on killing sprees, but they ended by killing each other. And it was not only White supremacists who killed themselves; virtually every segment of society was represented on the official suicide rosters -- rich, poor, conservative, liberal, atheist, Oriental, Hispanic, European, even some African Americans took their lives.

That first week was a hungry man's nightmare. We lived as islands unto ourselves. The national television and radio networks -- regrouping, no doubt -- cancelled programming. The local station did likewise. Newspaper stands were empty. There we were, cut off from the world, left to own imaginations and explanations. Chaos. (Thank heavens, there were few riots.) Schools, factories, office buildings, and public transportation were shut down. Only the churches, synagogues, and temples were opened to the ➤

2 My experience was similar to that of John Howard Griffin, a White novelist who temporarily darkened his skin and lived as a "Black" man in the Deep South in the late 1950s. When he first saw his blackened skin, he experienced a severe shock: "The transformation was total and shocking. I had expected to see myself disguised, but this was something else ... Even the senses underwent a change so profound it filled me with distress." See *Black Like Me* (New York: A Signet Book, 1960/1971), pp.15-16.

3 the Identity Church, a violent White supremacist group that popularized the term "mud people" as a contemptuous slur against Blacks. See, George Hackett, "Terror in the South," *Newsweek* V.C.X.V. n.1 (January 1, 1990), pp.34-35.

public. It did not seem to matter; most people stayed behind the locked doors of their homes.

I looked at my hand; it was black. I looked at my reflection; it showed a very black man. I looked at my hand again, it was still black. I rolled up my pants leg. Yes! My legs were as black as a moonless night. I looked at my reflection again, my hand, my other hand, my feet, and in the mirror. Jet-black.

Two weeks ago we "celebrated" the second anniversary of the Disaster. I suppose you could say that things are almost back to normal. The operative word is "almost." People have returned to jobs, to schools, to churches, to brothels, to whatever they did before the Disaster. However, there are two major changes. First and foremost, we remain black -- all of us -- and, second, there is a massive federal program, the Racial Identification Program (RIP), charged with determining our prior racial status.

RIP legislation was proposed two weeks after the Disaster by legislative aides to the late Senator Strom Thurmond, the Republican from South Carolina: critics claim that it was done as a memorial to him-- he took his life at 7:15 AM., on January 15, 1999. Opposition to the bill was spearheaded by the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Interracial Marriage Alliance, and many local civil rights organizations. The bill was supported by a coalition of powerful "Used-to-be" -- citizens who were certifiably White before the Disaster, chief among them; Jesses Helms, Patrick Buchanan, Sam Nunn, Donald Trump, and Al Campnis.

The bill swept through both Houses of Congress-- in three days-- and was signed into law by President Kemp on February 2, 1999. It went into effect that same day at 8:01 A.M.

RIP offices have been established in all American cities with populations exceeding 20,000 -- citizens in smaller towns now travel to their nearest RIP office for testing. The test as every American now knows -- has four components; Morphological Identity, Personality Inventory, Cultural Adaptation, and Intelligence Quotient. After finishing the examinations, we are all given a cumulative Rip score: scores between 100 and 93 are considered "White," any other score equals" Non-White." "White" citizens are issued special identification badges, license plates, stationery, door mats, and other items, indicating that they are" White," or "Used-to-bees." Federal officials assure us that the scores will not be used to foster discrimination in housing, education, jobs, or any other area, only for "statistical" purposes.

"Mr. Pilgrim, please remove your clothing and lay with your back on the table."

"I can save you a lot of time."

"Have you had any surgery?"

"No."

"Have you ever had any eating disorders?"

"No."

"Were you active athletically as a child?"

"Sometimes."

"This will not hurt you."

"I'm afraid of shots."

"This will not hurt you, Mr. Pilgrim."

When I awakened there were two doctors and a nurse standing near me . One of the doctors told me to put on my clothes, so I put on my clothes. The other doctor, looking somewhat perplexed, said to me, "Mr. Pilgrim, we have the results of your morphology examination." He then systematically -- like a snail-- went through each item of the scale -- maybe thirty items.

My nasal index⁴ was 65 or what is called leptorrhine (narrow-nosed), the nose of the Used-to-bees.⁵ My ➡

4 Nasal index is the relationship between the width of the nose, measured between the wings, and the length of the nose from the juncture of the nasal bones and the frontal bone to the juncture of the septum with the upper lip.

5 According early 20th Century racists, the nasal index as an effective way to distinguish races. Blacks were characterized as platyrhine or chamaerrhine (wide nosed); Whites, leptorrhine (narrow-nosed); and Orientals, mesorrhine (medium-nosed).

cephalic index⁶ was 74. The doctors called it dolichocephaly; I have a long head. They informed me that many "real" blacks have this "long-headedness."⁷ My facial index⁸ was 83 which corresponds to mesoprosopic (medium-faced); this was confusing because the long-head and broad face are supposedly restricted to "pure" Blacks and people called Armenoids. They estimated that my cranial capacity was 82: they said this meant I had the cranial capacity of a Chinese male or an Italian woman.⁹ They assured me that my brain complexity and convolutions were within acceptable parameters.¹⁰

For more than an hour the doctors puzzled over my results. They talked about jaw protrusions, eye color, sweaty hands, ear wax, and other "scientific" concerns. Their comments were vague and unimpressive, and I felt tired. They told me that I had thin, inverted, anthropoidal lips, usually reserved for Used-to-Bees. I was also told that my body did not have a disagreeable odor and that my penis was proportionate to my body.

Before our session was complete, I learned that I had heavier bones, less body fat, longer forearms, narrower hips, and longer legs than Used-to-Bees. And I had a shorter trunk, larger neck, shallower chest, longer hands,

6 Obtained by dividing the maximum transverse head breadth by the maximum glabella-occipital length.

7 A score of less than 75 indicates dolichocephaly, one of 75-80 mesocephaly (medium-headedness), and over 80 brachycephaly (broad-headedness).

8 Obtained by dividing the length of the face from the root of the nose to the bottom of the chin by the maximum breadth across the molars.

9 Craniology reached its peak in the 19th Century. Craniologists, such as Samuel George Morton, argued the larger the size of the cranium, the greater the average of intelligence. In 1849, he claimed that English skulls had an average cranial capacity of 96 cubic inches; Americans and Germans, 90; Blacks, 83; Chinese, 82; and Indians, 79. See, Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p.74. For a recent refutation of Morton's ideas see, Stephen Jay Gould, "Morton's Ranking of Races by Capacity," Science vol.200, n.4341 (May 1978), pp.503-509.

10 In 1935, Robert B. Bean, professor of anatomy at the University of Virginia, in a published study, claimed that the brains of Blacks were deficient in the number and complexity of their convolutions. See, "The Races of Man: Differentiation" and Dispersal of Man" (New York, 1935), pp.94-95.

and wider feet than "real" Blacks.¹¹ I was almost a mesomorph, almost not a mesomorph. One of the doctors asked me if I knew how to float; I told him that I was deathly afraid of deep water. He wrote on his pad that I could float and said that the examination was finished.

Yesterday the News-Dispatch reported that the P's were being examined, so I knew that I would get my call soon. I handled the call well, unlike most of my friends who whined like three-day-olds. If the truth is ever told, I was calm throughout the "Disaster," as it is called.

About an hour later two new doctors came into my room. One was an old, fat man, sweaty, with a pencil in his mouth; the other was a woman-- maybe thirty and very handsome. She told me to sit at the desk, take out a #2 pencil and complete a questionnaire. It was very long -- 344 items. Most of the questions asked about daydreaming and nightdreaming.¹² At first it was interesting, but then it became cruelly boring, so I pretended to read items and hastily colored the ovals for "Definitely not true for me." I finished the test in about an hour and gave it to the woman doctor; she gave it to the man doctor; he began to correct my exam.

He told me that I needed to answer some more questions; I agreed. She asked if I preferred reading them myself or for her to read them; I said it did not matter. She began:

"If someone strikes you what do you do?"



11 According to Richard Mazess, professor emeritus of medical physics, at the University of Wisconsin: "Basically, Blacks have heavier bones and lower body fat." Quoted in Daniel Seligman, Fortune v.116, n.2 (July 20, 1987), p.102.

12 The questionnaire was called the Imaginal Processes Inventory

"Strike them first?"
"But what if they strike you first?"
"They won't get the chance."
"I see. Would you rather earn a million dollars or win it
in a lottery?"
"Win it in a lottery."
"Why?"
"Because I have never won anything."
"Are you musically inclined?"
"I like music."
"Do you have any musical talents or gifts?"
"I don't think so."
"Do you cry at funerals?"
"I don't go to funerals."
"What if your best friend died?"
"I'd probably go."
"Would you cry?"
"Probably."
"What is your favorite color?"
"Red."
"Why red?"
"I don't know. I don't really have a favorite color. I just
thought I'd give you one."
"I see."
"What did I say?"
"Thank you for your answers, Mr Pilgrim. Please wait in
the hall until I come for you."

They returned in fifteen minutes with my results. The man doctor told me that I was superstitious, lazy, happy go lucky, musical, ostentatious, very religious, naive, slovenly, unreliable, pleasure loving, sensitive, gregarious, talkative, and imitative.¹³ She then thanked me for my cooperation and told me to get a good night's sleep.

Alone in the room. I sat in a chair near the window. Outside three little boys played tag. They were laughing in the way only small children laugh. As I watched them, I wondered what color they used to be.



13 Stereotypes of Blacks held by Whites as recorded by David Katz and Kenneth Brally in 1933. See, "Racial Stereotypes of One Hundred College Students. Journal of Abnormal Sociology and Psychology vol. 2B (October-December 1933). pp.280-90.

Rhythm Bred

The challenge is to chase the sun
through the leaves of blue corn
into the pollen,
through the 1991 drum-machines,
into the original rhythms
of Santana's hands.

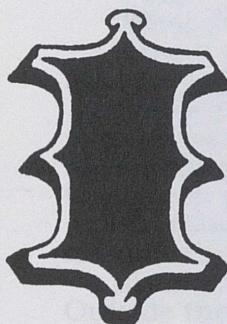
Through the White and Chicano,
old enemies of the corn.

To chase it through my skin,
half-bred,
into the sacred pollen dancing
on the skin the drum.
To let the Sun brown it giving
back the color of the ground.
Alive with the taste of pollen
and the rhythm of dancing.

Aaron Matzner-Dominquez
Pasadena, CA 91126

The **Homestead Grays** Benevolently Played the **Crafton/Ingram** Church League All-Star Baseball Team

E. Lee Goucher
Whittier, NC



n the first quarter of this century, sandlot baseball as played by young men in their 20's was an important part of the social structure of many small towns. This is the story of one such game in a small town west of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Crafton/Ingram Church Baseball League, one of the oldest such leagues in the United States, ended its season on the last Saturday in August. In the 1920's the three best players from each of the league's eight teams were chosen to form an "All Stars" team. Two or three times every summer the "All Stars" played a semi-Pro or true professional teams from out of town.

These young men were truly great amateur baseball players, especially considering the little time they could devote to the game. Four evenings each week in the summer, they would hurry home from work and change into their uniforms. They would carry their spiked shoes, bats and gloves and walk to the Crafton Athletic Field, which had no locker rooms. All of them had played ball in high school or college and a few had experience in the minor leagues.

The games would get under way just as the town clock on the old second Ward school struck 6 p.m. Daylight Saving Time would usually allow nine innings to be played. Lighted ball fields were unknown in the 1920's.

Walking down Steuben Street toward the ball field, a boy might spot a player he knew and hurry to catch up to him. He would volunteer to carry the player's glove and favorite bat. Regulation gloves were much smaller and lacked much of the padding and webbing favored by today's players. The boy could produce a satisfying sting to the palm of his hand by pounding a ball into the well-worn pocket. The genuine leather gloves smelled of sweat and oil, stimulating the senses of any boy. Many of the gloves bore the branded signature of one of the great Pittsburgh Pirate players of the day: Arky Vaughn, Paul and Lloyd Waner, and the all-time great shortstop, Honus Wagner, among others. Their memories are enshrined today in the Baseball Hall of Fame. In the 20's, they were every local boys' heroes. There were no Little Leagues or any form of organized sports outside of high school for boys (or girls for that matter). However, during the spring and summer, any boy worth his salt could find a pick-up game and join in without formality of any kind.

The All-Stars played three exhibition games each season. One game was played against a team filled by a religious sect from somewhere in Michigan. They traveled from town to town preaching the Gospel to anyone who would listen and playing baseball against any team courageous enough to face them. They were a frightening bunch with heavy beards and long hair when such was not fashionable. Make no mistake; they were excellent ball players and well worth the modest admission fee charged to see them play. Of course, little boys never paid a cent to see any game. They went under or over the fence and could easily outrun the overweight volunteer fireman who had been pressed into service to police the perimeter fence. ➤

The boys would crawl through the underside of the bleachers and lose themselves in the crowd on the splintered wood seats. A bucket was passed and all the men tossed in a few coin or perhaps a bill if they were prospering and their team was doing well.

Satchell Paige was so expert at his profession that he could, if he so chose, throw pitches that would result in home runs, triples, doubles singles, fly balls or grounders and, of course, balls and strikes. His next and final pitch this day proved just how good he was. He tossed a slow ball to Jones who reared back and swung his St. Louis Slugger bat with all his might. The crowd held it's collective breath as the bat made contact with the ball.

The second All-Star game was played against "The Crawfords," one of the two Pittsburgh area teams in the Negro League. They were superb ball players but not as famous as the other all-Black team the "All-Stars" played one Saturday evening just before Labor Day in the mid 1920's. The ball team that bought fans from all over the Chartiers Valley to Crafton was the famous Homestead Grays. Although there probably was not a single black family living in the Crafton area in those times, the color of the players' skin was not what brought the crowds to this game. There was no public address system to announce the names of the visiting players as they ran onto the field. Had there been, it would have made little difference. Unfortunately, to the all-white spectators, most blacks looked pretty much alike. Especially in their baseball uniforms.

Year after year the Homestead Grays alternated with The Crawfords to win the pennant of the Negro Baseball League. These players were world-class champions in every sense. More than 20 years would pass before these great ball players would be allowed to play in the Major Leagues.

Jackie Robinson would be the first to move from the Homestead Grays to the Brooklyn Dodgers to break the color barrier. Satchell Paige would pitch as many as three or four games in two days and appear as fresh after 36 innings as he was in the first. Josh Gibson, the catcher, was often called the black Babe Ruth for his ability to hit towering homeruns day after day.

Every seat was taken and hundreds stood along the outfield fence as the Homestead Grays put on their pre-game show. They were not only great ball players, they were exhibitionists. The infield came alive with a dozen baseballs whizzing from base to base simultaneously. Players were firing balls from first to third and from third back to first passing over and under balls being thrown from home to second and second back to home with lightening speed and precision. When a player dropped a ball, probably on cue, the other players would bombard him with several closely thrown balls which he, of course, fielded expertly. All these highjinks were accompanied by much shouted camaraderie. While all this was going on, other players were knocking high fly balls in rapid succession over the infield to the outfielder who, in turn, would throw the balls back to the overworked catcher at home plate. Finally, one of the umpires would shout "play ball." The local "All Star" players would protest that they didn't want any part of this and start to leave the field until a great cry arose from the crowd urging them to play and "beat the bums."

"Come on, George, baby, show them what a great shortstop you are."

"Hey, there Sky, remember that one hitter you pitched. Do it again, big boy!"

"How about another grand slam, Dee Dee?"

"Yeah! You guys can beat them! Come on, play ball."

With pretended reluctance the local boys finally took the field and a great roar went up from the crowd. Tall, red-headed, "Sky" Twyman wound up and fired his fast ball into shorty Montgomery's catcher's mitt with a satisfying pop.

"Strike!" The umpire shouted.

The visiting Grays batter shook his head in disbelief. Another fast ball and another strike without the bat ➤

leaving his shoulder. He gripped the bat hard and made threatening swings toward the pitcher. The third ball whizzed across the plate and the batter swung way high.

"You're out!" Shouted the umpire to the delight of the cheering crowd. The scenario was about the same for the next two batters and the teams exchanged places.

Satchell Paige, the Grays' pitcher, had an elaborate wind-up that intimidated the first three All-Stars to face him. He threw nine perfect strikes to the chagrin of the wildly swinging local boys.

In the second inning, the Grays' batters hit three towering fly balls. One to right field, one to center and the other to left field. All were easily caught and this apparently restored some confidence to the All-Stars who managed to load the bases in their half and Danny Jones hit a grand slam home run that bounced around the tennis courts beyond the rightfield fences. The score at the end of the second inning was 4 to 0 in favor of the locals. During the next several innings the Grays managed to strike out, hit into easy double plays or get caught stealing, all to the delight of the one hundred percent partisan crowd. The All-Stars added a run or two each inning until the score stood at nine to nothing in their favor at the end of the seventh inning.

Josh Gibson opened the top of the Grays' eighth inning with a tremendous homerun that cleared the roof of the two-story houses beyond center field. The ball landed in Steuban Street where dozens of boys had waited for this opportunity to collect a souvenir ball. Batter after batter repeated this performance until the Grays had put seven runs on the scoreboard.

Sky Twyman, the All-Star's best pitcher, threw down his glove in mock disgust and walked off the field. This was the clue for the Grays' manager to rush over to Sherm Weaver, the manager for the All Stars, and offer to "lend" him a pitcher. The spectators close to this scene told their neighbors what was transpiring in front of the bench that served as the "dugout." Soon everybody in the stands was shouting "no" or booing loudly. Finally, order was restored and Sky returned to the mound to strike out the next three batters. In the bottom of the eighth inning the All Stars struck out in order but were still ahead, 9 to 7. Everyone thought, now, if we can just hold them!

But such was not to be. The Grays added two more runs in the ninth inning by loading the bases and having two runners steal home, much to the embarrassment and frustration of the All Stars' catcher. The score was tied, 9 to 9, when the All Stars came to bat for the last chance to win.

Shorty Montgomery watched two strike balls whiz past but managed to hit the third pitch for a triple. The crowd went wild. The Grays' pitcher walked the next two batters to load the bases. It was said the crowds cheering could be heard all over the Chartiers Valley. Satchell Paige was so expert at his profession that he could, if he so chose, throw pitches that would result in home runs, triples, doubles singles, fly balls or grounders and, of course, balls and strikes. His next and final pitch this day proved just how good he was. He tossed a slow ball to Jones who reared back and swung his St. Louis Slugger bat with all his might. The crowd held its collective breath as the bat made contact with the ball. Poof! A little pop fly ball caught by the pitcher (one out) who fired the ball home, confusing the All-Star players who all started to run. The catcher threw to the third baseman (two outs) who threw to the first baseman who in turn tossed the ball to the second baseman and caught poor Phil Weaver in a run down for the third out. A fantastic triple play to end the ninth inning with the score remaining tied 9 to 9.

Twilight was rapidly fading. The street lights flickered on and the bats (the kind with wings) were pouring forth from the belfry of St. Phillips Catholic Church as they did every night at dusk. The umpires huddled with the team managers. The game was called because of darkness. The crowd roared its approval. The records would show that the Crafton/Ingram Church Baseball League All-Stars had played a tie game with the mighty Homestead Grays!

I feel privileged to have been one of the little white boys who witnessed that long, long ago game. The Homestead Grays, some of the greatest baseball players the game had ever known, had honored our quiet little town by their visit.



Freedom

The chains that bind me rattle as I walk.

I dare not sing or hum or talk
for I may be conspiring to escape
these bonds that bind and threaten to make
me humble.

So I bid my time. I bow, scrape and mumble
and act a fool for these strange men
because in years to come we must win.

The weight of the cotton bolls bend my back.

The whip is my promise if I don't fill my sack.
My future festers like an open sore
that fails to heal. I feel

I must comprehend
the written word. I must pick up pencil and pen
because in years to come we must win.

Lift every voice and sing!
I'm free at last, like a bird on wing.
Four acres and a mule is my prize
for hundreds of years of bondage! My eyes
are watching God.

She was 17, I was 10 (and a half). Besides a love of mathematics, we had something else in common. We were living in the same dormitory. We were talking about our families. She told me her mother was a student at the University of Florida, and she had so many brothers and sisters, we all used to eat together often. I didn't have to go out and mix with the local people. They were local ignoramus. It was funny what they were staring and pointing at.

But, O merciful God,
where do I go from here? There is hope and fear.

But I've gathered together all my kin,
because in years to come we must win.

Sit-ins, grimy jails; I win my civil rights.
Burning crosses, lynchings and painful, sleepless nights.
I can sit where I please, and go anywhere.
But those strange people strip my soul bare.

I protest!

It's my given right! I've been blessed
with the will to conquer the lion in his den.

In the years to come, we must win.

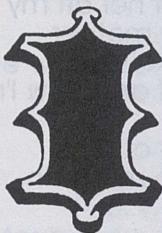
Now I face cocaine, heroin and crack
and she is a power master, I can't get her off my back.
I miss the gentle arms of my mother
but she threatened to smother
my ambitions. I needed to find myself and now I'm lost.
I've paid the cost!

Now I must defeat this life of sin
because in years to come, we must win.

Barbara J. Battle
Washington, D.C. 20018

The Palest Shade of Black

Julia Toth
Potsdam, NY



**remember the day I
met Renee. I was in the
library, hangout of all
dissatisfied young
people. She stood there
reading, all excited
about whatever she was
reading--I don't
remember what. She
smiled at me. I gulped.**

To describe me as a "young person" was right. I had my precious adult room library card, newly won, in my hand. I took the bold feelings that I got when I made up my mind to ask the librarian for that card, and went up and said "Hi."

She was 17. I was 10 (and a half). Besides a love of mathematics, we had something else in common. We were living in the North Country. We are talking White white. She was there because her foster parents retired and moved here. She was legally emancipated, and loved by them, so they brought her with them. I was here because my parents found land here. My parents didn't leave the farm very often, didn't have to go out and mix with the local people. They thought local ignorance was funny when we kids were stared and pointed at.

The people stared and pointed because we are all non-white, me Hungarian Romany, Mongoli and Jew. Renee was black, originally from Alabama. It didn't make much difference being honey beige or cork colored when, either way, you were the only person with brown eyes in your class. To my knowledge, we were the only Asian people in the community, Renee the only black person in our town.

Yet I never felt patronized by her even though she was so much older.

I mostly kept my friendship with her a precious secret.

As far as ethnicity, culture, we talked about everything. As far as race, she said that I was beautiful. I thought that she was. I loved to braid her hair, and how her hands had brown webbing in the creases, and how different her nail color was from mine. I never told her I wanted to be kissed by her, to find out what her mouth felt like. I was too shy for that. Our eye color, the shape of our noses, and, as I matured, the curves of our bodies were the same, and equally out of place where we were.

By the time I was back in school that first year, she was off to college. She promised to write, "yeah right" I thought. Not only did she write, she sent me bus tickets up during the first school vacation I had off. I didn't even tell her what my schedule was, I don't know to this day how she found out, but I went to college for one day, and wandered the capitol with her. It was only 40 miles to the state college, but to me, it could have been Mars. I was delighted. My parents were furious when I got home. I didn't bother to tell them where I'd gone that day. I think that they would have given permission, but somehow doing it independently was part of the fun, and the punishment part if it, too.

After that, adventuring was definitely part of the component. We wrote back and forth, and by the time I was

13, we were going to New York City.

What does a needle parlor look like? What goes on in abandoned buildings in Hell's Kitchen? I could tell you. I could also tell you what the parties were like, and what it was like to go from being ugly to being pretty. I kept my mouth shut, mentioning my race wasn't really appropriate anyway, and probably "passed" as a light-skinned Black, especially since I was well liked by Renee. And in case you're wondering, I neither became an addict, nor did I get beaten or raped. I was safer, by far, in the New York Ghetto than I was back upstate.

I wished that there was a place where people like me lived together, even if it did have piss smelling hallways, and all of the other scary things about New York. One quarter Romany will not get you in. Not enough of anything and too much of something else, in every case. Broken connections and isolation was a part of me. My parents could do the "back to the Earth thing," and not deal with society at large, but I was lonely.

Borrowing Renee's roots was a joyous relief from the feeling of strangeness, without often losing that feeling, that I was a not a beautiful light-skinned Black, but a counterfeit.

As my social circle expanded, I found another group to blend in with, much to my dismay. There was a Reservation near my town, and the people there were trying to improve their circumstances. The results for me was that I was often mistaken for one of them, and this time, getting roughed up by local children and questioned by police.

My sister and brother missed out on this. My sister had much fairer skin and coarse, straight black hair. She passed as Chinese, when people tried to guess. My brother had redder coloring and brown, wavy hair, and passed as Italian. They, too, were going to the much safer, smaller Catholic school, not the public school. I went there, too, for High school, but that didn't protect me from people on the street, or from the scars.

Then, during my last summer vacation, Renee asked me to come with her, down South, to help her with her Master's thesis.

We got in her car, and drove down. My parents knew that I was going on vacation and that Renee's parents (her "up here" parents) approved, and that was all I wanted them to know.

We were guests of ministers all the way down to the little community Renee had chosen to study. I learned about a

different kind of poverty, the kind where people in America starve to death. I went on my first official date, and had my first official kiss, in a way, the kiss I'd wanted from Renee.

I talked to the minister, the first person besides Renee that I'd talked to about race, and he didn't have much to say. And when we went down to dinner, no matter how I watched him, he had not changed toward me. Later, he told me about how you can't choose who your parents are, and that some Black people traced their ancestry back to the slaveowners, but that didn't make them part master. A great deal more, too but that line has stuck in me all these years, that ancestry and privilege don't always go together. From that part on, I more or less was at peace with "what" I was.

And Renee...she too, was happy, at peace, unlike I'd ever seen her. I knew, inside, soon, that I would leave her here. We did the work for her thesis, but I don't know if she completed the project. We stayed our two weeks, and she remained in the minister's household. I went back home by bus. I wasn't sad about it; it seemed right.

The completion of my education, my education in what mattered, occurred back up North, away from great food at church socials, and adolescent boy's shy, trembling kisses.

To my great surprise, one of the people I knew had been to the same town where I'd been. I mentioned one of the streets, how the trees looked at dusk. His eyes narrowed. "I wouldn't let a good white woman in Nigger town at night. No telling what they'd do to her. Or her reputation after."

He talked on, and I smiled weakly. He had assumed that I was one of them, that I needed protection. One only protects what one owns. I felt for the first time, that someone was saying that I was their possession, and that I should take that as flattery!

Because I was different, I was never important enough to be owned, protected. I was free from White obligation. A worthwhile price for the loneliness. I wondered what he would think if he knew "what" my date to the church social had been. I kept that as my secret.

Black culture and identity is unique, and valuable, and I would never take it on as my own, I have my own identity now. But, after having shared somewhat in the culture and problems, sometimes I feel as if my Amber is, in its own way, the palest shade of Black.



On The Way

Ah, look at how the genes write themselves in skin
burnished bluebrown by Sengalese sun! I cast
about for high Cherokee cheekbone, the long
thick thigh and slim foot of indelicate size
But blood hides its commonality in shapes
varied as pieces of a Carolina quilt.

We are called to the motherhouse, a quilt
of questions nestled at our throats. Skin-to skin,
we clutter the aisle of the bus. Comfort shapes
the coastal swing south to where our fates were cast
by white Tom who gave his name but not the size
of his worth to free-ness we earned hard and long.

The far red dust saps our unity. The long
sameness through Maryland windows spreads a quilt
of old splintered memories. I see the size
of our grandfather's memories where sassafras skin,
tansy weed, a summer fireplace and cast
a spell on scratchy egos and childhood shapes.

It is that hybrid hours before dawn when shapes
struggle to take back their names. We flop like long
dolls with broken limbs, eyes dark, heartslight; a cast
of confederates beneath one bloodhound quilt,
walking to celebrate ourselves: who will skin
the rabbits -- who will sort the cake eggs by size?

We were guests of miners all the way down to the little
communities. Rivers had chosen to stay. I learned about a

To The Family Reunion

Our joy roars past morning. The bus is a size smaller than survival. But there are shapes of other giants: silos in metal skin glint greetings in the soya fields all noon long. We stare back at redcows hoofdeep in a quilt of grass. We're interloper; they, the real cast.

Harmonies born before Cape Horn rise and cast off all separateness. We try on for size a prayer of joining. Softer than fog, a quilt of grace covers our frailties, reveals new shapes. Our babies, fat brown gems, are here for the long haul. Blood blushes, contentment plumping our skin.

We empty the bus, casting vibrant lifeshapes. May our size increase; may our earthstay be long. Eve wove us into a quilt deeper than skin.

Gloria Bush
Philadelphia, PA

An Ugly Duck Is Really Just A Swan

Tinisia L. Green
Arlington, TX

**"...98 cents bleep, 49 cents bleep, a
\$1.20 bleep. Ma'am your total is
\$5.78. Will this be paper or plastic?"**

"Brenda why don't you take your break next," Al Langley yells from the elevated courtesy booth like some king issuing orders from his throne. If an award for snob of the year was being given, Al would win first place. He thinks he invented air and only certain people are good enough to share it with him. And being the biggest brown-noser I've ever met, those certain people only happen to be his boss. He thinks he's going to get the manager's job when Frank leaves. Personally, I can't imagine anyone wanting to climb the grocery store career ladder, but then again I don't consider Al a person.

"O K," I reply as I hand the lady her groceries. Passing the canned goods aisle, I wonder who is back in the breakroom. Campbell's Chunky Vegetable Soup Sale .89 cents. That's a good price.

"Hey Bren, what's up?"

Good. I was hoping Tisha Warren would be back here. Really, she's the only friend I have on this job although I've been here for nearly three years. I like Tisha because she is independent and educated. A computer programmer, she's the only sister working for this store who is not a cashier. She always reads during her break sitting off in a corner with her legs crossed and her head cocked like she's listening to something instead of reading. Tisha lives in my apartment complex too. So, sometimes if we have the same schedule, we ride to work together.

"Hey Tisha, what are you reading now? *Mules And Men* by Zora Neale Hurston." Tisha is always reading or doing something interesting. "Is this good? You like that Zora, don't you?"

"Yeah," she chuckles as she swings her leg, "this is my fifth time reading this one. It's about this lady who after living with a domineering grandmother and two oppressive husbands learns to enjoy life for herself. It's a very uplifting story. You ought to read it sometime."

"Maybe I will. You know Tisha, I've been thinking about what you said, about going back to school and all. If I did that, I think that I would like to become an art teacher."

Looking up from her book, Tisha said, "That's great Brenda. You know I think you would make a wonderful art teacher. You are great with people, and I've been saying for the longest, your ceramics are really good. What does Gary think?" Tisha sort of frowns when she asks this last question like she's expecting some bad news.

"Oh, you know he doesn't take anything I say seriously. He's always saying I never finish anything I start. He said maybe if I went back to school they could teach me to talk right."

Curling her lip up, Tisha makes a smacking noise. I know what she's going to say, but this time she just remains silent. With a headshake she goes back to reading her book.

Sitting in the small cramped breakroom with its one card table, three chairs, coke machine, time clock, wage posters, workmens comp poster and equal employment poster, I wonder why I work here. Gary has a good job now. A mouse scurrying toward the coke machine stops for a second and looks at me.

"Folks, tonight we want to present an award to a young man who for the last 12 months has ranked number one in his region. His gross sales have been in excess of ➤

\$10 million. Gary Price has been with Kleinen Pipes for just two years. A graduate of Texas Tech and husband to his lovely wife Brenda, Gary definitely has a bright future ahead of him. Come on up Gary and receive this token of our appreciation."

I wonder what time it is? Man, just snagged my hose. This night started off bad. It's all Gary's fault. First he criticizes what I am wearing.

"Isn't that dress too loud? Why do you want to wear red? Baby we are going around some really conservative people. Change into something else."

Then it's, "If anyone asks, tell them you are a housewife. You don't have to tell them you work at a grocery store." And to think that job at a grocery store kept our heads above water when he was out of work for a year.

"As a matter-of-fact babe, why don't you just keep quiet and look pretty." I can't believe he said that. What am I anyway, a token?

"Miss Price, Miss Price I was asking, you must be very proud of Gary," a strange looking little man asks. He sort of reminds me of a rat the way his eyes dart around. Or a polecat. "Yes I am."

Gary returns and proudly shows me his plague, "Excellence In Achievement." I smile and nod my head approvingly as I wonder if he will get a raise.

The sound of hands clapping reminds me of the applause of spectators at a tennis match. Stiff and foreign. The last of the awards are given and the dinner is served - lamb, carrots and potatoes, with artichoke salad. As we eat, several jokes are shared around the table.

The polecat laughing, raises his palm and tells everyone, "Listen to this one. My mother goes to Jersey City, and wins the jackpot on the slot machines instead of checking the money into the hotel safe though she returns to her room with it. She gets on the elevator with her purse stuffed with about \$500 in coins. On the way up the elevator stops and four big black guys in suits get on. Now imagine , here's my mother, a tiny little Jewish lady from Boca Raton with about \$500 cash on her and she's stuck in the elevator with these guys. She's nervous you can bet. Then one of the guys says, 'Hit four.' Thinking they are going to rob her, mother misunderstands and hits the floor. Coins fly everywhere."

Ha. Ha. Everyone cracks up. I don't see what's so funny. I find myself staring at the polecat; I want to poke his eyes out. Then I feel this jab in my side. It's Gary, his eyes beg

me to join in the laughter. I am the only one at the table of eight not laughing; I just am not amused. The polecat notices my stare, clears his throat and continues. "The men tell mother they aren't going to rob her and help her up. They say they really are sorry. And the bill has already been paid by a guy named Eddie Murphy. Can you believe that?"

Driving home it begins to rain. I'm glad. It drowns out Gary's voice. His criticisms. I don't care if the person telling the story was the owner, Mr. Kleinen. That doesn't mean I have to laugh. Gary can't see what I'm saying. All he can see is that I embarrassed him. Well, to tell the truth, he embarrassed me.

Knock. Knock. Someone's at the door. Adjusting my bathrobe, I peek through the hole. It's Tisha.

"Come on in. Where you going?" I know she's not going to work. She's dressed too nice.

"Oh, I have a lunch date, but I wanted to drop this class schedule by. Registration is today and tomorrow. You really ought to take at least one class Brenda. Test the waters out, you may do good," she says while handing me the papers.

"That's easier said than done. I feel like my grammar skills are so poor. I really hate to read. I concentrate so hard on the words sometimes, at first I don't get the meaning of what is being said. I might not make it through. Tisha I never told you this, but it was a real struggle for me to finish high school. All my life people have told me I'm dumb. Growing up I heard it from my older brother and now I hear it from my husband. Maybe they are right, you know."

"Brenda do you remember the story of the ugly duckling? How all its life this duck heard it was awkward and ugly. It grows a bit. Then one day it sees its reflection. The reflection is so beautiful that the duckling, now a swan asks the other ducks who is that beautiful creature. 'Why you,' they respond. Brenda, stop being afraid to look at your reflection."

This has been one hectic day. Doggonit, look at that line. I've been here for six hours. Where is my relief? Good, here she comes. I haven't had a break today and I go home in two hours.

"Tired, Brenda?" the new cashier asks as she changes the register drawer.

"Shoot yeah," I sigh while trying to rubberband together the coupons that are in my drawer.



Whew, I'm exhausted. Today even this breakroom looks comfortable. There's that smell again coming from the restrooms around the corner. People really are pigs. On the other side of the room those two teenage girls huddled together look like they are reading a magazine, maybe *Cosmo*. I can't really tell because the long yellow hair of one is covering the title. They are new, but I think I've seen them behind the video counter. They giggle. Probably something on sex.

"Brenda!" Al bellows, "customer just complained. The ladies bathroom is a mess. Get the bucket and here's the spray. Go clean it up".

"Al, I'm on my break if you hadn't noticed."

"So?" he asks, still brandishing the spray.

"This is my first break today. I have been working six hours non-stop," I say as I readjust myself in the folding chair.

"So finish your break later, but get off your butt now and clean them toilets."

"What is wrong with someone else? Why can't they do it?" I say pointing to the girls. "I just sat down and I'm not getting up."

"You know I can fire you for insubordination."

"Al," I say quietly as I get up and walk toward him.

"Yeah," he replies with his head cocked to the side.

Calmly I take the spray can from his hand. He smiles. I remove the cap and as nonchalantly as if I were spraying the bathroom, I spray Al's crotch. "I quit."

Walking away I can hear the girls laughing, and this time I laugh with them.

There is a reflection in the Bursar's window. As the line moves closer it becomes larger, but funny I still can't make out what the reflection is.

"Next," drawls the heavy lady behind the window with the wrapped hair-do and huge dangling earrings.

She takes my registration, glances at the sheet and without looking up she says, "Tuition and fees will be \$234, how will you pay?"

"Check," I reply nervously. Two hundred thirty four dollars and zero cents. Signed Brenda J. Price.

When I look back up it's staring at me. It's clearer now. I recognize that reflection. It's me.



Old Woman's Work Song

What do you do when the men ridicule
you at clearing fall's garden-plot, like a fool? You
pull up more stalks, pull up more thistles, and you spurn
'em.

What do you do when the men are all laughing?
You're milking the cows, you're tending the calving! You
jerk still more teats, spare still more cream, madly churn
it.

What do you do when the bull goes for your child?
("All women are weak. All men should be wild.") You
snatch up the pitchfork, shake it in his face, and you turn
'im.

What do you do when your son scorns his teacher?
Talks like a white boy, sasses the preacher? You
grab the strong birch rod, grab the thick man's belt, and you
learn
'im

What do you do when your man starts to failing,
too early starts dying, lies there just quailing? You
lay down your tools, start to rest easy. 'cause you earned
it.

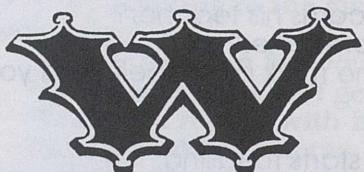
And what do you do when the men start to mocking
since they have the maize, the wheat, the feed-shocking?
You
pull up more dry stalks, pull up more thistles, rake them
together.
And you burn. You burn, you burn, you burn
'em!

Eugene Kraft
Mangilae, Guam

When the sun goes down and the bedroom looks
like a movie set, the stars show a hissy fit from the
ceiling. The stars are the ones that may be
the most important in the sky. They are the ones that
make up the night sky. They are the ones that
make up the night sky.

Vicissitude

James E Cherry
Jackson, TN



hoever would have thought it. Whoever in their right mind would have thought it. Not I. Certainly not I. I heard the

news from Porkchop, you know Arthur Hill's boy. You know "Chop;" tried to play football down at the high school. That's right, I said tried. Worst gotdam football player I ever seen in all my natchul boan days. Onliest boy I ever knowed to put a jockstrap on backwards. Well anyway, it was 'Chop that told me all about it. 'Chop might be a dope smoker, wine drinker, ex-con collard green, fatback eating/dirty drawer wearing/part-time

**hustler, but he ain't no liar. And this
is the low down, no more no less:
Roosevelt Lincoln Washington done
changed his name. Quit his job, too.
Do you believe that nigger? Done
changed his name after 50 years. The
name his poor old patriotic mama
gave him. A good gotdam name on top
of that. That old woman must be
losing her rotten mind just about now.**

Jabari. Jabari Jelani. What the I've heard of Kareem Abdul Jabbar. But no damn Jabari. How many points he ever score? I hope he can pay rent off of his name cause they ain't handling out jobs no more, especially to no Black man. What the hell done happened to that boy?

Black folk sho' is a confused bunch of people right about now. I'ma havta set Roo'velt straight about this shit. Here come his black ass now. Now that is Roosevelt Lincoln Washington, not no damn Jabari.

The sun held a 3 o'clock captive in the afternoon sky. The November winds had woven together a myriad leaves that covered the earth like a blanket. All was quiet, still from the chill in the air.

Ledfoot stood in his doorway watching Jabari bound up the street with a strong, quick gait, like a proud man with something definite on his mind, with his destiny in sight and his plans already formulated before arrival. This dark complexion middle-age man whom Ledfoot had helped through the rites of passages, this man walking, this broad-shouldered man with a moustache, greying hair at the temple and beginning to bulge middle section whom Ledfoot had considered a son, whose mention of his name made him feel proud as a father, this man walking past his door right now, he had difficulty recognizing. What in the hell is he wearing?

"Roo'velt. Hey, Roo'velt!" Ledfoot hailed Jabari with the summons of his hand, then stood aside, holding the screen door open for him. "Come here, Negro." ➡

Jabari, a six-foot-one-inch 190 pound smile, took the steps two at a time until the dilapidated porch creaked and moaned in protest of his unexpected and weighty appearance.

*I don't know about anybody else.
But I've thrown off the yoke of the
oppressor. At least mentally anyway.
I'm not gonna let anybody define or
determine who I am or what I can
do anymore.*

"Habari Gani, Pop." The screen door slammed behind Ledfoot, rebounded, slammed shut as he furrowed brow and all followed Jabari into the house.

"Can you borrow what?" Before awaiting a reply he dismissed the query with a wave of his hand. "Have a sit down over there man. I want to ask you something."

"Yeah sure, Pop." They sat on the green and blue sofa each leaning forward, looking deeply into one another. "How you been feeling?" Jabari felt himself slowly beginning to sink, as if the couch was quicksand.

"I'm feeling the way a 76 year old man suppose to feel. Like tired shit. But looka here I wanna ask you something."

"Yeah?"

"Have you had a nervous breakdown or something?"

Laughter bounced from the ceiling to the floor, reverberated around the corners of the room as Jabari threw back his head and released basketballs of mirth from down below. "What are you talking about, Pop?"

"Don't laugh gotdammit. I heard you changed your name and quit your job at the bank. And what is this shit you're wearing wrapped around your shoulders? What the hell's wrong with you, Roo'velt?"

"That's not my name anymore, Ledfoot. My new name is Jabari. Jabari Jelani. Isn't that sharp? It's a Swahili name; means brave, mighty one. You like?"

"Naw." Ledfoot with upturned palms. "What made you do something like that? It was them Black Muslims, wasn't

it? Walking round here selling them damn bean pies and talkin' that Honorable Elijah shit."

"The Muslins had nothing to do with it, Pop. It was me. Good ole Roo'velt Lincoln Washington. I made the change all on my on. I had to."

"Whada'ya mean you had to? Roo'velt Lincoln Washington is a good name. Besides, I knowed you is brave and mighty. That's the only way I wanted you to be."

"Yeah, well, the more I think back on it, the more I realize how lucky I am to have had you a part of my life." Jabari felt the sharp bone as he gently squeezed Ledfoot's shoulder. "But that name, my old name, is a slave name. I'm a born-again African. I'm making a complete change."

"A born-again what?" Ledfoot's mouth hung open from disbelief. "When was the last time you been to Africa? Did you say hello to my cousin Shaka Zulu when you was over there? What do you know 'bout Africa? Hell, I barely can spell it."

"That's what I mean, Pop. It's time we started to learn about the Mother Land. It's time that we start looking at the world from a Black or African perspective and stop looking at everything through blue eyes and blonde hair. We have a rich and glorious past and culture of our own. We have to get in touch and rediscover what is naturally ours if we plan on surviving and remaining sane. I mean it's insane to have a African body and a European mind. We are African people, Pop."

"My folks didn't come from Africa."

"Where'd they come from?"

"Tennessee. Around Jackson, Tennessee. You know, you just used a word a minute ago. Insane. I think you need to look that word up in the dictionary and then pay a visit to the counseling center and see if they go by the same definition that you read, if so you'll be in the right place."

"Pop. I don't believe you said that." Jabari clasped his hands behind his head, leaned back, exhaled long, deep, "I'm not crazy. I'm most definitely in my right mind, now. For the first time in my life I know I know who I am. I know the truth. I know I am not what they told me I was all these years: a nobody. I'm a new creature. That's why I changed my name to reflect a new me. I'm sorry you can't understand that."

"What I can't understand," Ledfoot rising, hands on hips, pacing a crooked circle, "is why now. Why after all these years? You ain't no kid no more Roo'velt --"



"Jabari."

"Scuse me, brother Jabbar. Ain't neither one of ya'll no kids no mo'. You a 50 year old man. I don't know if you know it or not, but once you turn 50, it's all down hill from there. Just look at me." He paused, allowed his breaths to catch up with the expelled words. "So, why all the change now?"

"It's never too late to change, Ledfoot. It was just my time to awaken. It was my time to reach this level of consciousness. If I can change for the better anybody can do it." His arched eyebrows encompassed Ledfoot.

"Hell naw." Ledfoot raised bony hands that had stop written over the palms. "Don't even think about it, Roo'velt. I'm just gonna die the way I am now. Plain ole me. I done went from nigger to negro to black..... I guess you one of them African-Americans now, huh?"

"That's right, Pop," Jabari standing, "and so are you. You are an African King. If you were in the motherland right now, the people of the village would come and sit at your feet to gather all the wisdom and knowledge that you've acquired over the years."

"But that's the gotdam problem, Roo'velt--"

"Jabari."

-- That's what I meant. We ain't in Africa. We in America. And I'm just a ole ass man who nobody gives a damn about like the way nobody gives a damn about any old people anywhere. All I got to look forward to is a damn Social Security check that only buys half of what it's supposed to buy, having a good regular bowel movement every blue moon and death, which I see every time I look in the mirror."

"But that's American bullshit, Pop. When I look at you I see a king. I always have. You've been where I'm trying to go and know the best way to get there. I need you. Your guidance, your patience, learning and love. You are my ancestor. I have nothing but respect and reverence for you. You are my connection to who I really am. Without you and my other ancestors, I cease to exist."

Ledfoot marched off to the kitchen, left Jabari standing near the couch with the words "ancestors my ass. I need a drink," falling around his feet.

With a sigh, Jabari collapsed back onto the couch, ran his fingers through his thinning hair. He just doesn't understand. Is he capable of understanding? Does he want to understand? Enloe William Robinson a.k.a. Ledfoot. Old

man. Old man who lives in a old house on a old street in a old world. Old man who has been old as long as I can remember all of my life. Old man with a head full of liquid silver that runs down the sides of his face, drips under his chin; lean and gaunt; skin the color of coffee with a drop of cream; blue cardigan sweater, brown corduroy trousers cover his frame. A living institution. A breathing monument. Tutweiler Avenue personified. A life of continual constancy. Even this room hasn't changed since I was a youngster: green and white sofa, threadbare throw rugs, behind-worn wooden chair in the corner, TV in the other, antique lamp on a scarred table in the other, picture of Jesus over the TV and a elongated mirror over the sofa reflecting a panoramic view.

Ledfoot clacked the drinks down on the glass coffee table, two vodkas and orange juice. Jabari noticed the din of the TV: Geraldo was on with women who were once indecisive of their identity (because they had sex changes to change their sex) but who are now not so sure.

"What the hell you gonna do about a job, Roo'velt?" Ledfoot sat stirring his drink in counterclockwise circles, glanced at the TV, punched the off button on the remote. "I don't understand how a man could walk off a good job down at the bank after what, 15 years? Wasn't you some kind of vice something or nother?"

"Jabari. You gotta call me Jabari, Ledfoot." A hard swallow. "Yeah. I was something alright," he replied, not touching his drink. "I was your average token run of the mill yessa boss let me shine your shoes kiss yo' pretty white ass some more what can I do for me Black man." He thought he saw a smile on Ledfoot's face that matched his own. "Yeah, I was something or the other alright, Ledfoot. How can a man have any type of self respect or pride feeling the way that job made me feel? I just took it as long as I could, then couldn't take no more."

Ledfoot spoke through a half-empty glass. "But what about tomorrow? Just because you change you name don't mean that the rent ain't gonna come due. It always do. You know that for a fact."

"Oh, yeah, I know about the rent, Pop. But I got enough to tide me over to January---"

"January."

"--right January. That's when I start teaching over at the college full time. This'll finally give me a chance to use that master's degree besides something to show on the ➤

wall. This teaching job will give me a chance to give something, of myself, to my people, young Black people. For the first time I have a chance to make a difference in my life and in the life of people who are going through the same things I'm going through."

Ledfoot sighed in the silence that hung in between he and Jabari. Jabari folded his arms across his chest and stared into nothingness. Upon a head to toe examination, Ledfoot came upon an Epiphany. This was the man, the man that he had inculcated the precepts of pride, of dignity, of self love, of integrity. This was the man of principle that Ledfoot knew -- that little nappy-headed, snot-nosed Black boy whose mama, for God only knows why, named him Roosevelt Lincoln Washington. Ledfoot suddenly realized that this was the day of fruition. The day that a man became a man. Standing for what he believed in, even if it meant the loss of money, security, life. Ledfoot understood now that he had been blinded by his own sight.

"Well," the tinkling of ice in an empty glass shattered the silence, "it's getting late. But I want you to tell me this, what good is changing your name when you can't change the color of your skin. As long as this --" he stroked Jabari's arm -- "is Black you'll always be considered a nigger. You might as well change your socks. Leastways, yo' feet wouldn't stink.

"Hey, I don't know about anybody else. But I've thrown off the yoke of the oppressor. At least mentally anyway. I'm not gonna let anybody define or determine who I am or what I can do anymore. God determined man to be free, and my soul and mind are free this day and forever. As far as I'm concerned there are no niggers. That word has been projected upon us, and we have bought into the lie that Black folk don't know how to act; that all Blacks are niggers. That's the lie But the truth is that the real niggers are the projectors of the lie. He, Pop, the white man is the original nigger. So, if people want to call me this or that, cool. I know who I am now. I know the truth. God is on the side of the truth."

"Is that the way it is? Jabari." They were both standing, stretching, scratching, going for the door.

"That's the only way it can be, brother Robinson."

"Looka here, man. What's this shit you wearing 'round your shoulders?"

"That's kinte cloth, Pop. From the West Coast of Africa. Its sharp, huh?" Jabari took the black, red, gold and green

scarf-like material, reverently placed it around Ledfoot's neck. "I should've done that a long time ago. Will you ever forgive me o' great and noble king."

"Ah, get out of here Negro!"

Jabari stood on the porch, Ledfoot in the doorway noticed the faint glow of the street lights, the stiffness in the approaching night air. I could've sworn it was daylight just a few seconds ago. Damn things happen fast. Change does not always drag its feet, slithers on its belly, hides under a shell. But change is a sometimes hawk flashing through the sky, flashing back, and turning its prey's world upside down. And sometimes the prey is you and I.

"Hey. What was that word you said when you first came in here?"

Jabari turned, watched Ledfoot's breath under the magnifying glass of the cold air.

"Habari Gani. That's Swahili, Pop. It means 'what's the news.' When somebody says 'Habari gani' to you, you say 'njema'. That means 'the news is good.'"

"Njema, huh?"

"Yeah, Njema," They hugged goodbye. "I gotta go, Pop."

"Take care of yourself, Jabari... and thanks for this... this... whatever kind of cloth it is."

The door shut, locked, bolted, Ledfoot picked up the untouched watery glass of vodka, raised it to his lips, stopped and instead gave the kitchen sink a long gurgling drink. It was in the mirror over the sofa that he stared, running the fine silks of the Kinte cloth through his fingers with that word "Njema" smiling through his head.





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Memory of Wings

I heard a great humming
herald the holy one's coming,
rhythm rumbling as it rose
above the bent backs of the cotton rows.

Through a fold of molten air
a blue-black man with snow-white hair
landed lightly on the trembling field
to share the secret he concealed.

Faith lifted my eyes
to see an angel in human guise
with human hands black as mine
walk along the planting line.

He urged us all to remember wings
sacred spells and ancient things
ancient songs and ancient chants
to power the ancestral dance.

Lift up! He said, the sky is yours!
Ride the wind to your native shores!

Many rose swift as thought
singing out the words he thought
dropping sacks, seeds and hoes
as they climbed above the cotton rows.

Those of us whose tongues were slow
could only watch and remain below.

Driver man cursed the sky
as the flock went soaring by,
black wings against the sun
beyond the bite of whip and gun.

Memories of magic and holy wings
ease the ache bondage brings.
Still I scan the sky and pray to see
the holy one coming back for me.

Jabari Asim
St. Louis, MO

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