



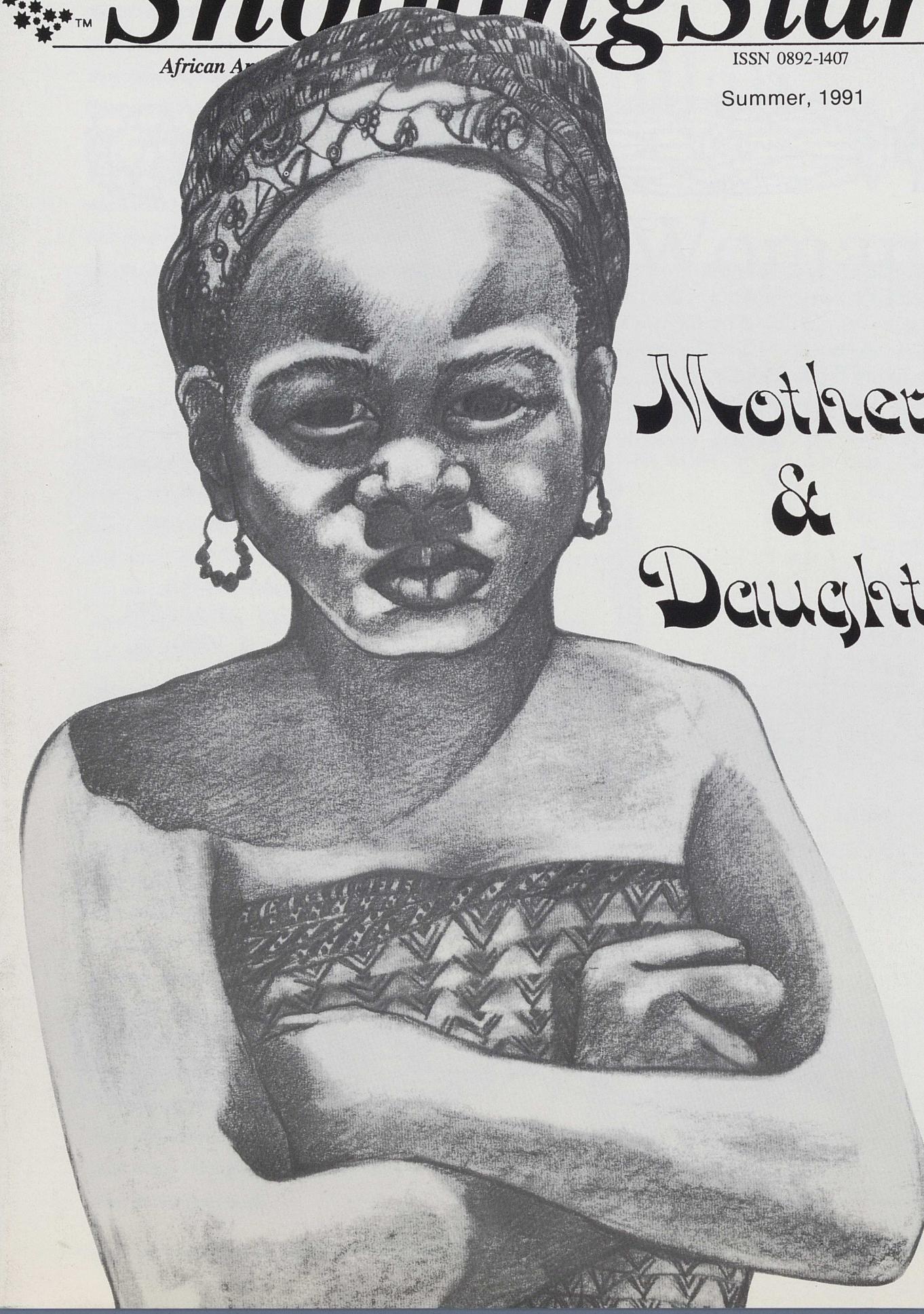
ShootingStar

African Art

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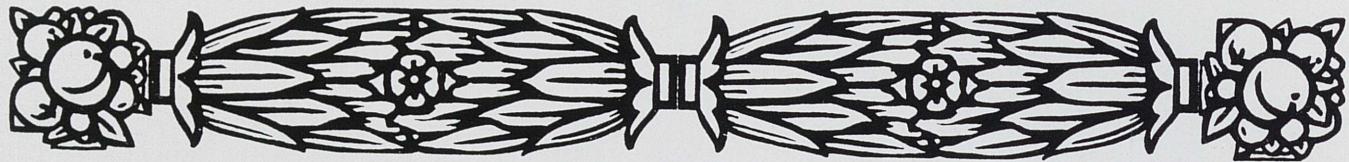
Summer, 1991

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Mother & Daughters

\$3



AT FIRST WE LIVED WITH GRANDMA AND GRANPA. THEY HAD RAISED MY DAD'S BOYS FOR SEVEN YEARS. THEIR MOM HAD DIED IN CHILDBIRTH. GRANDMA HAD A BIG BLACK WOOD BURNING STOVE. SHE COOKED ALL THE FOOD. FOR BREAKFAST SHE MADE EGGS AND THICK CRISPY BACON AND BISCUITS.

THE SAME FOR ME GET ON TABLE. HOLD ON APRON COOKED. BUTTER AT THE I WAIT WHEN SHE PIECE OF IT TO MY EYES

LIVED IN THE COUNTY HOSPITAL AND BROTHERS WHO WERE EIGHT AND SIX YEARS OLD.

Hi, I'M SKOKIE. I WAS BORN TO BARRED COLORED WOMEN PATIENTS.

ADJACENT TO THE COUNTY HOSPITAL I MET MY TWO HUSBANDS. ONE WAS A NIGERIAN. THE OTHER WAS A CHINESE. MY MOTHER AND FATHER IN A TURN HOME WAS AT MY GRANDMA'S.

ELLS MADE IT HARD TO WAIT FOR IT TO THE DINING ROOM SO I WOULD GO TO GRANDMA'S WHILE SHE COOKED THE BISCUITS KITCHEN TABLE. CHED THEM. THEY FINISHED, BROKE OFF A ONE AND GAVE ME. I CLOSED AS IT MELTED

IN MY MOUTH. GRANDMA PUT ME IN MY HIGH CHAIR. EVERY BODY ELSE CAME TO THE TABLE, TOO. I JUST ATE AND ATE TILL I COULDN'T EAT ANYMORE.

by Clarissa Sligh

New York, NY



Watch out for Gullah women
 they have held something in their memories
 they have kept secrets in their language
 they know the stories of the frog and turtle
 they wear red and know how to watch the seasons
 how to catch crab, shrimp, and you
 My woman is a sea marsh
 Her eyes capture the sun and make the
 moon dance around her brown pearls
 My woman is a Sea Island waters,
 waters that traveled from Benin to Beaufort
 on the backs of gray and brown porpoises,
 they run over you like a midnight wave
 cover your naked body, full and complete
 Her lips cover your thoughts,
 transpose your dreams, sing in your songs, and motion.
 Her smile is an evening wind between Hunting and Flipp Islands,
 soft, warm, and easy with palmettos blowing on the shores and eagles flying over the river,
 her lips are smooth waters and tides that porpoises
 play in near the Port Royal Sound, gliding between sand reefs
 and flat bottom boats, waters where African fisherman throw their
 hand woven nets to catch fish, her waters have caught me.
 Her hands have picked tobacco
 Her strokes are smooth and tender
 like fine Sea Island cotton
 Her hair is thick, strong, and black
 She braids her African hair and her
 face is my inspiration, her face is Sierra Leone.
 Our daughter is named Maisha, she is
 the spirit of the sea, water turning over from
 a wave, she's impatient and reserved.
 Our baby girl is stubborn and quick.
 I look at her round brown face and see you,
 see me, and hear a new sea song.
 feel a softer, quieter country song.
 Watch out for Gullah women
 they know the ways of plants and spells
 they'll steal you away.

Gullah Woman

Melvin E. Lewis



FOUNDER'S STATEMENT



mothers to renew a fascination in soap bubbles and dandelions. They let us retrieve the moments that build maturity, millennia when we should have smothered instead of spreading rumors, times when we should have said "No" and meant it, instances when we should have said "Yes!" and loved it.

My dictionary offered few daughter words, only daughter-in-law, daughterly and Daughters of the American Revolution. But *Shooting Star's* artist's more than make up the difference in this "Mother Daughter" issue. Take a deep breath and dive in!

Sandra Gould Ford

Mission Statement

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. is a non-profit corporation that exists to promote artistic and educational outlets for Black culture.

Mother, n. 1. a female parent.

The English language has quite a few words that involve "mother." There is Mother Carey's chicken, mother church, mother country, motherfucker, Mother Goose, motherhood, Mother Hubbard, mother-in-law, motherland, mother lode, motherly, Mother of God, mother of pearl, mother of vinegar, Mother's Day, mother ship, mother superior, mother tongue, Motherwell, mother wit and motherwort.

Motherdom is also associated with apple pie. The connection works. Just take big, tart apples, stir in spices and sugar, wrap in a flaky crust and bake. The big tart apples are life's bittersweet lessons. The spices and sugar are attitudes. And good crusts hold and nurture their own elements before feeding others.

Daughter, n. 1. a female child or person in relationship to her parents.

Daughters bring gifts. They allow

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SUBMISSION POLICY

FREE Submission Guidelines with helpful information, including upcoming themes and maximum word counts are available with a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). All submissions must include a self-addressed envelope with sufficient return postage and artist's name and address on each page.

Shooting Star Review is completely free-lance written and open for graphics, photography, illustrations, short fiction, folktales, essays, reviews and poetry.

Written work must be neatly typed, double-spaced and legible. Send poetry and fiction in separate envelopes. Artists submitting material for publication can come from any cultural background, but all work must relate to the Black experience.

Shooting Star Review

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COVER ARTIST

Laurie Jean Jackson received a B.F.A. and a B.A. in History from Carnegie Mellon University in 1987. She has worked with the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery and with the Smithsonian's Anacostia Museum in Washington, D.C. Much of her work combines conventional oil painting with the unconventional use of fabrics, ribbons and quilting. The artist now resides in Philadelphia, PA. Her work also illustrates Melvin Lewis' poem *Gullah Woman* on page 3.

We were poor, but never broke. Hidden beneath a pile of old shoes on the floor of my mother's closet was a black pocket-book full of silver dollars. She had saved them from the tips she earned as a waitress. When she came home from work she emptied the coins from the big pockets of her

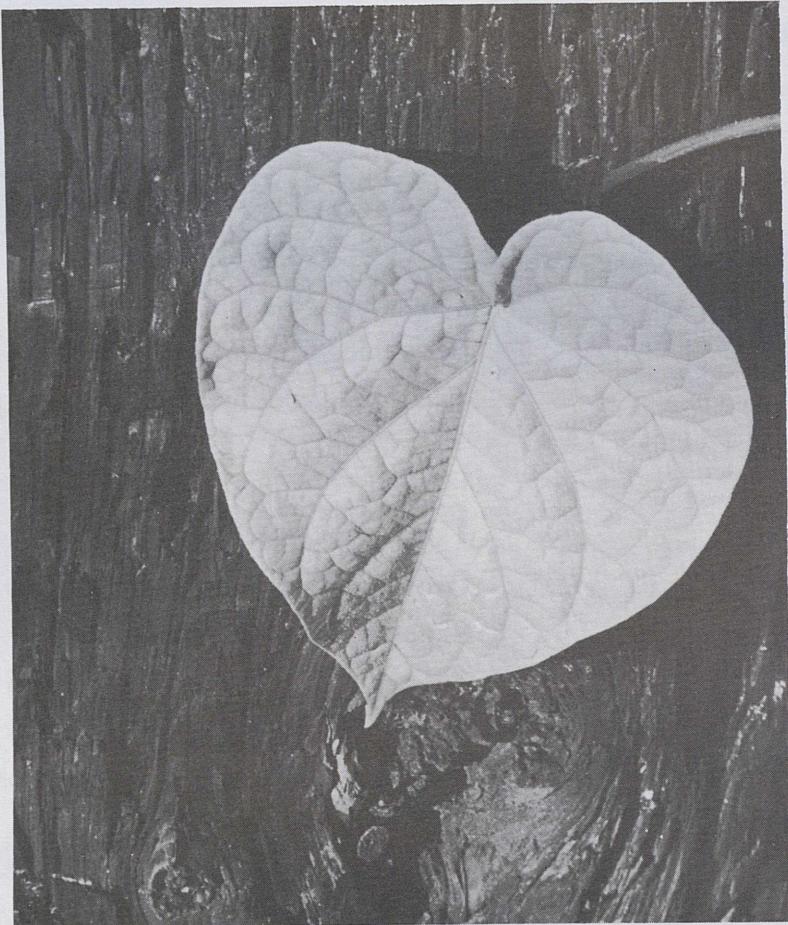


Photo (c) by Sandra Gould Ford

Silver Dollars

Patti Tana

Long Beach, NY

apron onto the kitchen table and I'd help her sort the pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters. We'd count them as we stacked them into piles, and then stuffed them into paper wrappers of red, blue, green and orange that we'd exchange for dollars at the bank. Usually there were a few

half dollars and these we put aside to spend or, if they were beautiful, save with the dollars. My favorite was Liberty striding across the earth in her long loose gown, seven stars above her outstretched arm, the sun blazing at her feet.

At least once a month my mother would bring home a silver dollar. I would get out the black bag and examine the date and picture of the new addition before I added it to the collection. On some the eagle stretches out its wings, holding them up or down, grasping arrows and a branch in its talons. I liked the ones where the eagle's wings are folded and it is looking away from me into the distance so I can only see its back. PEACE is written on the mound where it perches. On the other side of the coin is the head of Liberty crowned with rays, her hair flowing back from her face. I'd feel her smooth cheek on one side and the fine rows of eagle feathers on the other, the raised numbers of the date and the date the letters of the words. The coins were round and solid and heavy. They were made of real silver and they seemed to be worth much more than the green paper that creased and soiled and tore.

The most I ever counted at one time was 150. When they ran low, down around 50, I became nervous. Usually the black bag contained about \$100, and that was enough to give me a sense of security. I

knew that when we had to we could dip into the stash and buy a quart of milk, a dozen eggs, and a large loaf of seeded rye bread - all for one silver dollar.

One time when I had my heart set on going to the movies I was very disappointed that my mother didn't have enough money on hand for me to go. I can't remember what was playing. The admission was 20 cents, the same as a quart of milk.

She thought for a minute, smiled, and went upstairs to her room. When she came down she placed a silver dollar in my hand.

"No," I protested, trying to give it back to her. "They're only in case of emergency - for necessities -"

"This is a necessity," she assured me. "The soul needs sweets."

I knew what she meant. She had often told me the story about her father, who we called Papa. It was the Depression. She was raising her first child alone, with whatever help her father could give her. They were shopping together in a crowded grocery store when a young woman placed her selections on the counter, among them a small carrot cake. Quietly she asked the clerk if he could pay the bill at the end of the week.

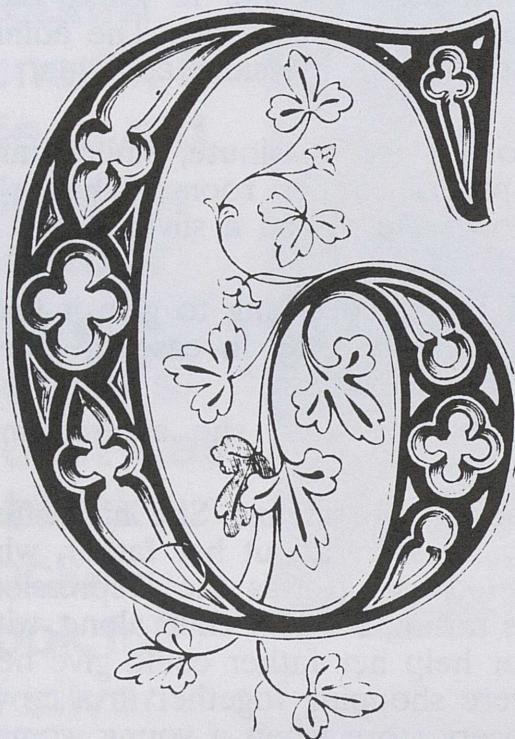
"No cake for beggars!" he boomed, taking the cake off the counter and putting it back on the shelf. Everyone was stunned into silence.

And then Papa said, "Give her the cake. The soul needs sweets."

I took the silver dollar and went to the movies. I even bought myself a chocolate bar with nuts to eat during the show.



“Willy Dee, you get your
black ass out from
behind that shed before
Mama comes along and
sets us
both
straight
about it.”



ROWIN' UP IN MAMA'S HOUSE

Barbara Kangas
Mountain View, CA

“Aw,
come on,
Ceily”,
Willy
sauntered
up
alongside
the shed,
“I ain’t

hurtin’ nothin’ back
there.”

“That don’t matter.
Mama said don’t go back
around there messin’
with that motorbike and
that means whether
she’s here or gone.”

"Yeah, well - one day Papa's gonna be here and he'll let me ride it, just you watch and see. Fact is he'll take me out first thing when he gets back and all you'll see is dust we'll be leavin' behind. I bet he'll even be mad that nobody bothers to keep it clean. Mama just leaves it sittin' back there and she don't do nothin' to keep it from rustin' up."

That was late in the summer of '54. Willy Dee was 7 years old and I didn't have the heart to tell him that our papa was long gone and that it was best to be left at that. Mama said it's not right to spoil a young man's point of view 'bout his Daddy else he might get to thinkin' that the blood runnin' through his veins holds the same evilness that got hold of his papa. She said that it could make him go off runnin' wild and actin' crazy and stuff.

Papa had been gone for just about three years and if Willy had to hold to the truth he'd have to tell you that he hardly even remembered Papa, but that still didn't keep him from holdin' on tight to the idea that his Daddy was gonna come walking through the front door at any time. I don't think Ledda Mae or I ever waited on Daddy's comin' home 'cept maybe with a feelin' of dread that he might actually do it. And Mama, she didn't have the time of day to give to that man. Course she hardly had the time of day for herself either, actually speakin'. Every day, 'cept Sunday, she'd be up before dawn so she could get to work on time usin' nothin' but her own two feet - thanks to Daddy having taken the car for his own self, leavin' us with nothin' but that old broken down motorcycle that no one here even knew how to ride. And Mama, she worked hard all day as a maid in a house not far from our schoolhouse. Auntie Til say "maid" was a nice name for it but slave was more like it. She was always sayin' how it was a shame how those

people worked Mama so hard and gave her so little to show for it. By day's end Mama be walkin' home on swollen, tired feet so Ledda Mae and I, we'd try to help out with whatever we could.

Anyway, I was the oldest, being older than Willy Dee by six years and Ledda Mae by two so I pretty much took charge of them and we'd all do our chores around the house. At evenin' time Ledda and me would always try to fix somethin' up for dinner so Mama wouldn't have to be bothered with it when she got home. It wasn't always the best food as far as taste goes, in fact, Willy Dee was always whinin' about it but we

were more than rewarded when Sunday rolled around 'cause every week after church, Mama would come home and start fixin' the evenin' meal. Oh, I remember some of the

best food I've ever tasted bein' cooked up right there in our little kitchen on those Sunday afternoons. The smell of that cookin' must have drifted right on out our door and down the street too, 'cause Sunday was always the day we'd have a neighbor or two "drop in for a spell" right around dinner time. And this I remember too, if Mama had to stretch a dollar it was never a dollar from the food allowance because when it came to food there was plenty for everyone and usually, everyone wanted plenty when Mama was workin' the stove.

Daddy always fancied Mama's cookin' too. So much so that after Daddy left we heard Auntie Til tellin' Mama that if it hadn't been for her chitlins and pork chops he never would have found his way home at all and if he was to come back now it would surely be at meal time.

Auntie Til never kept quiet 'bout anything weighing on her mind and her opinions 'bout

Ledda Mae and I had been curious about the rumors of Uncle George and Miss Lois but the rumors about Auntie Til had frightened us almost to death.

Daddy seemed to weigh plenty. Every time she'd be over and Daddy's name came up that would be enough to set her off. Mama would usually just nod her head in agreement and listen with a smile across her lips. It was hard to tell by Mama's expression if she was really payin' attention to Auntie or just off somewhere in her own thoughts 'cause anyone who knew that once Auntie got goin' onto somethin' there was no sense in even tryin' to do anything but to just sit back and wait it out.

Mama's other sister, Florence, held the same bad feelings 'bout Daddy but she took a different approach to expressin' them. "Yes, ma'am" she'd say, "I said it right from the start. Some men is just no good and sister, you done let one of the worst work his way right up into your bed. Now take a good look at what he's done to your life. Yes ma'am, he's the devil all right." Short and to the point. That was Auntie Flo's way. And always bringing her religion into it. Daddy was the devil according to Auntie Flo, and Mama had better watch out because he was a sneaky bastard with his sights set on her destruction.

It was during one of these sessions that Mama heard Willy around the corner in the hall and rushed him off to bed hoping that he hadn't heard any of the talk comin' from her bedroom. When she went in later to tuck him in, she found him asleep but his pillow was still wet with tears and his face was swollen from cryin'. That's when Mama called an end to all the bad talk about Daddy. She said maybe she couldn't control what people said elsewhere but she damn sure was gonna control what was said in her home. After that things seemed to settle down a bit. Auntie Til and Auntie Flo still tried to get a word in here and there but they was always careful to make sure that Willy was out of ear shot before they got goin' and even then Mama usually cut them short.

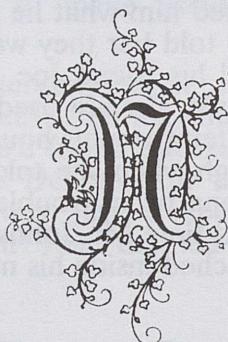
The talk among the town folk was that Auntie Til and Auntie Flo should have kept their noses out of Mama's business and tended more to their own. Some said that if they'd kept their thoughts to themselves in the first place, Papa'd still be home 'cause he didn't walk out so much as he was chased out by the two of them. They

said Mama's a saint but those two sisters of her's drove him out as sure as they drove him to drink and some of Papa's friends called it a miracle that he was able to last as long as he did what with the bullyragging he took. Finally the drinkin' lost him his job and things heated up to where he just couldn't take it anymore. Even after he'd gone Auntie Til and Auntie Flo just continued on advising Mama and not carin' a lick what folks thought. Most of what folks thought was that they had no room to talk about Mama's situation when they were so bad they couldn't stand to face them and that's why they busied themselves so much with Mama's life. Even though Ledda Mae and I heard this kind of talk nobody would explain its meanin' to us until one day when Bobby, the kid from two doors down told us that Auntie Flo's husband was jumpin' Miss Lois Allen every Saturday night and everybody laid claim to knowin' that Miss Tillie was what some people called a Lady-lover. No one could say who the lady was that she was supposed to be lovin' or how and why that notion came about but Bobby did say that women being with women was an unnatural sin and that if Auntie Til was what they said she was then she had better make amends with her creator. When we asked Mama about all of this she just shook her head and told us that sometimes people start rumors, not because they're true but because they don't have an understanding of something. She said that when a woman chooses to live her life without a man, even though men have come courtin' her, people get to talkin' about reasons why and if they can't find somethin' obvious they'll resort to speculatin'. She told me that I could see for myself how accurate the speculatin' was in this case. I'm not sure what she meant by that but I guess she meant that Auntie Til was not a lady-lover. Anyway, Mama also said that even if the rumors about Auntie Flo's husband were true, that was something between those involved and no one else's concern. After discussing this between ourselves, Ledda Mae and I decided that Auntie Flo's husband most likely really was jumping Miss Lois and Mama couldn't really tell us the truth about it either.

Ledda Mae and I had been curious about the rumors of Uncle George and Miss Lois but the

Continued on page 12

I USED TO THINK MOTHER WOULD INHERIT THE EARTH



*o wild horses, four-letter words
or espresso for mother. No mention
of gristle in her steak. She'd swallow
it first, and personal belief.
Under long-sleeved sweaters,
the bruises from my father healed.
First time she complained, mother wasn't
soft spoken. She let them know
in malls and restaurants and betting
at the track that she carried
"a piece of my mind" for salesclerks,
lawyers, chiefs. Everything takes
a little getting used to, she said past
divorce, neighborly advice and family
opinion, past fear of second class
and suspicion of what is thick, dark.
She's converted to coffee with her cognac.
She says, Don't let anyone give you shit.*

Susan Landgraf
Seattle, WA

rumors about Auntie Til had frightened us almost to death 'cause we just knew that everyone who'd been spreading these rumors about Auntie Til must surely know what Ledda and I had been doing with each other when we laid in bed together at night. Up to that point we hadn't thought much about it, only that at those times it was just the two of us feelin' real good together. We didn't even know there was a name for what were doin' or for girls who did it with each other. After that it wasn't so good anymore and we stopped; both of us fearing for our very souls and waiting for the rumors to get back to Mama that her two daughters were damned for sure.

Willy Dee meanwhile was getting into his own kind of mischief and by the time he was 10 Mama got a call from the shopkeeper on the corner sayin' that Willy and two of his friends had been caught behind the counter stickin' rubbers in their pockets. As soon as Mama hung up the telephone she was marchin' down to the store and when she showed up back home with Willy in tow she was threatening him within an inch of his life and askin' him what in tarnation he thought he was going to do with those things anyway. Auntie Til, who happened to be visiting

at the time said that stealin' small things was just a boys way of provin' himself to his friends and that now that he'd gotten that out of his system he'd better straighten up and fly right but when word got around to Auntie Flo, she said that it just proved what she'd been sayin' all along. What comes from the father is passed onto the son. Ever since Daddy left, Ledda and I had been hearing Auntie Flo recitin' that verse every time Willy did somethin' wrong and we was out the door and runnin' down the dirt path behind our house giggling before she could even get started off listing each one of Daddy's faults that she believed Willy to be taken up. We weren't so much laughing at Auntie Flo or the fact that Willy got caught stealin' rubbers but we about spilt our sides laughing whenever we thought about the answer he gave to Mama when she asked him what he planned on doing with them. He told her they was the best water balloons he and his friend Joe Johnson had ever found and they'd already used up the supply Lil Joe had gotten from his house. Ledda and I heard Mama laugh when she told Auntie Til that Lil Joe was gonna be in trouble he wasn't reckonin' for the next time Mr. Johnson got twinkle in his eye and reached inside his night stand drawer.



AURORA

Reading Club

When Muriel Stewart began attending Aurora meetings, the members always wore white gloves and hats. Slacks only recently became acceptable. Pregnant members were unheard of.

Nearly a century ago, six African-American women — Rachel Jones, Hannah Lovett, Frances Golden, Anna Posey, Cora Washington and Virginia Proctor — started the Aurora Reading Club in order to pursue a systematic course of study ... for the mutual improvement of the membership in literature, art, science and matters relating to vital interests of the day.

What makes Aurora so special? The group's

Anyway, after that Willy Dee had three sets of eyes watchin' over him and that was not countin' Ledda's and mine and as far as we know Willie spent what he called "two days of hard labor" workin' off his debt at the corner store and never felt the need to pocket anything again but we all knew Mama still worried about him a lot. I guess he finally knew that his Daddy had run off for good but sometimes it seemed as if he blamed Mama herself. He said there must have been a reason else Daddy would still be around. Ledda and I thank God for the reason but it sure wasn't Mama. Willie, he just had no real memory of Daddy, only bits here and there so he don't remember Mama cryin' or seeing Daddy layin' out on the porch too drunk to get his self to bed. He don't remember how the drinkin' made Daddy meaner and meaner and how Mama sometimes had to make excuses about the bruises she wore.

The night time brought its tension but it was broad daylight when Daddy packed up his things in some old wooden crates he'd found out back and loaded them into our old DeSoto. The last sight we had of him he was just a speck disappearing down the long dirt road that led to the highway.

longevity for one thing. "Maybe," Mrs. Stewart smiles, "we have just chosen people who are homogeneous." More than that, though, Aurora has *standards*. Aurora's, "women should be mature," says Mrs. Stewart. "They should be established, understanding and without envy." Her description of Aurora members includes, "loving, compassionate, unselfish and giving." Aurora members also manifest shoot-for-the-stars approaches to life, and they abhor mediocrity.

"For the past 96 years," Mrs. Stewart says, "our membership has wanted to be together." And when they get together, the designated hostess provides a 1 pm luncheon extraordinaire. An hour-long program follows featuring a variety of cultural topics. Mrs. Stewart reminds, "Aurora is not a book club. We are a reading club with interests in music, theatre" and other cultural activities. The final hour involves club business. The group adjourns at 4 pm.

It was that same road that saw him return the summer after Mama had passed on. Auntie Til had been stayin' with us since the time when Mama had gotten sick and she'd been the one to answer the knock at the door. I had stayed home from school that day and when I saw the look on Auntie Til's face as she opened the door, I knew it was not anyone she'd been expectin'. And there he was just a saunterin' in through the door and sittin' down at the kitchen table askin' for a cup of coffee just like he'd never been gone. The reason he came back, he said, was because the car he had driven off in had come to the end of it's road and he was wantin' to pick up his motorcycle. My knees felt weak. Not one word from him about Mama or askin' after years before had spent so much time cleanin' up that motorbike waitin' for his Daddy to come give him a ride. I was happy Daddy walked around behind the shed and found the bike rusted over. Happy that Willie had finally given up and let it go. Happy that Daddy had no motorbike to ride and would walk away from here like the rest of us. And that's what he did. This time he was just a smaller speck moving a little slower down the road.

Although Aurora is a 25-member-only, lifetime association, several mothers and daughters, mother's sisters and daughters and mother & daughter-in-laws have joined. But, Mrs. Stewart's maternal heritage is exceptional. Her great grandmother, Mrs. Virginia Woodson Proctor, was a Charter member. Mrs. Stewart's great aunts, Carolyn Proctor Powell and Jennie Proctor and her aunt, Carolyn Stevenson, were members. And Mrs. Stewart looks forward to her daughter Laurel and granddaughter Lark one day joining this continuum.

Why would a woman want her daughter to join the Aurora Reading Club? "Because," Mrs. Stewart says, "Aurora is really one of the most interesting groups that any mother would belong to. Our programs are so variegated, so you are proud."

Hopefully others will consider the Aurora model and launch new bright lights and rainbows for our mothers, daughters and sisters to enjoy.



TIES THAT BIND

J.E.M. Jones

Hollis, NY

There's a special blessing in the ability to give your parent(s) grandchildren while they are alive to enjoy them. And - there is a special pain.

If you are fortunate enough to live near or with your parents; you get to view the on-going blossoming of the unqualified love only a gran can give. And, you get to see and hear the little things that both shape and re-shape a life.

I believe we all have the ultimate responsibility to "raise ourselves." To live through the trials and triumphs that occurred when our parents undertook the most important job that has no 'dress rehearsal'. No "practice runs." But, recently, I heard my mom give account of her time to my young son! "What?" I inwardly said. Mom is accounting for her time for even a moment to a mere child? It was truly amazing for, as a child, under similar circumstances, I never received the 'full story' of why you are so late to pick me up. 'Twas just assumed I'd wait and you'd show up (and, Thank God, I never entered the rolls of kid's merely left.) But, to actually hear her carefully explain why she was so late meet and greet him was like a three-edged sword.

My kid self said: "Damn, I didn't get that!"

My mom self said: "Good work, Gran." and

My adult self said: "My Lord, how we all keep growing."

The adult won. Probably because I am totally committed (for 15 years now) to raising myself. To the major journey that is me. To the unending melody of my presence on the planet. Not a path full of mind-fields; seeing slights and hurts of long ago (though I do remember them) but of calling in my own personal "bomb squad" to defuse the implosion. Bit-by-bit and piece-by-piece. Over icons of time and through years as a journeyman. And, even though my kid self still puts in time as an apprentice (part of the human condition); the adult self generally marches on toward the next sunrise. And sunrises are a moment-by-moment thing. I hope you do understand. They're for all of us.

So, as I am amazed to find; I'm a similar enigma too.



Melody To Mother



here's no wood in the fireplace.

There's no fireplace.

Only this blaze that darts between you and me.

We sit like churns waiting to be agitated.

You find comfort in old shoes and paper doll memories,

while I hold visions of dark ghosts and shades of purple.

Our conversation hollow.

Our affection closed up like a hermit cabin.

We sit until the house grows dark.

Have you ever heard me sing in my sleep?

Or known when my thoughts turn to death?

Did you ever read my work?

Or hear my heart crack?

Did you ever wonder why

we shiver before the embers?

*Mother, your daughter is still crying nights
anticipating that first laugh with you.*

Cris B. Lewis

Chicago, Ill.

To My Mama On Her High School Graduation

*Mama,
Under the heaven of your loving
arms, and lips releasing tongue
and arms and hands wielding belts
and brooms and sticks
to make me become what I am
After my own father left with death.
The tightness of your times
shifted your personal dreams
into what holds one now
for my own daughters
As, I, too, struggle
without a permanent man/husband*

*in those who sought the comfort
of your rot-gut whiskey and
promising hips
And, cutting chicken thighs
and breasts, and breathing
ammonia
and suffering swollen, bumpy
hands and arms that ointments
eased for only moments during
25 years
Until the forced retirement
of your orange-sized
brain tumor sent you to
recover in your daughter's love*

*and sought and got a senior
citizen's job to care for other
seniors and took advantage
of a city program
to get your GED --- You got it,
Sister Girl!!!
My pride so real,
so strong, so long,
'cause you didn't let me or
anything or anyone
disturb your studying.
And, I'm not the only one
Who can marvel at
Your GED, coming all the way from*

Your GED, coming all the way from
a whiskey still and paying off
the sheriff and getting unsure
child-care for four children
as you grew and now grow
beyond your past
to build your own life
to obtain your high school
or GED degree.

Pass the ACT and
Jackson State University
will, perhaps, admit you
unconditionally; and, continue
your hard studying. Mama,
to get your B.S. or B.A. degree
Whiskey-still Mama,

Church-going-confessing soul,
You are God's pride and joy first
and your children's pride and joy
next,

Keeping-a-smiling and keep up
the good work,

God bless you now and every,
moment the earth lives

Your daughter, respectfully,

Virginia Brooks-Shedd

As, I, too, struggle
without a permanent man/husband
Which you did (again) eventually
acquire for 10 years until his
death,
And, then,
Your life became
Your own again
And, everytime
you picked your own growth of a
tomato or green, or an okra
after your comatose post-brain
surgeon's surgery for a
miraculous rising,
I saw your life greening
to begin again;
Yesterly rising beyond your
corn-liquor cooking and
home-brew brewing years
for survival
To teasingly make a sale
As a playboy bunny and
keep men buying from the shack of
our lamp-lit
battery-radioed shack
that had live music from sweet
harmonicas of dead-dream lives





WINTERGREEN

John R. Keene

Dorchester, MA

As soon as Lelia Vance pulled off her scuffed, Army-regulation brogues and sweaty denim jacket, she falls backward onto her bed. Every part of

her body whines in pain, but her feet cry out a dolesome song. As she stares at the warped ceiling that threatens each evening to fall into

bed with her, one question enters her mind: how much longer can I keep up this regimen? Temping in the morning, waitressing in the evenings, manning at 7-Eleven on the weekends, getting three or four hours of sleep at best, all just to live in a cramped, drafty apartment and take care of a grown man who refuses to work. I cannot even afford dance classes anymore. How much longer? She closes her eyes. Her feet, biased in their appraisal of the situation, answer swiftly: not much longer if we can help it.

Abruptly, Lelia sits up, deciding that she will have a cigarette. Instead

however, she pulls from her knapsack a compact bottle of liniment. As if to rekindle by ritual the essential flame of her life's one, true desire, each evening she applies to her legs and feet the liniment, taking care to rub it in deeply, to remind herself what the present denies, to revive, each night, in her forearms and in her calves, the very essence of her one, real love. As she sets the bottle on the floor, her eyes return to the ceiling.

The fragrance of the liniment takes root in the space around her, grows inside her nostrils, blooms slowly in the well of her throat. Backward she rolls onto the bed, eyes closed, breaths softly escaping, tongue easy against the roof of her mouth. It was under this very charm of wintergreen, rising from the worn, pine floor of Mrs.



Purifoy's Dance School for Girls, that she had first surrendered her heart to the Muse of Dance.

--I'm sorry, but we don't have any more places right now.

--Nothing? Nothing at all? What was wrong with...

--Look, you have a unique style...good movement, sharp eyes, but you're lacking some of the fundamentals, and we need...

--Wait, if you give me another chance, I...

--I'm sorry, we just don't have any places right now...like I said, you have a unique style, excellent movement...there are other Black dance troupes in Boston and...

--But Mr. Nickerson...

--Please, I said...

--Okay, thank you...thanks for taking the time...I...thanks...

--...Hey...wait a minute...wait, maybe I can squeeze you into one of the classes here...hold on, don't go anywhere

She awakens to frantic knocking on the door. Darrell, she sighs. She gets up, sliding her feet into silk slippers, handmade by her grandmother, that she received as a going-away present the summer before her freshman year. As she heads towards the knocking, she passes the full-length mirror to the left of the front door. She stops before it, as she does whenever she heads to the door, to examine herself. Scanning the mirror's length she hardly recognizes the image staring back at her. The thighs, the hands, the face are all the same. The calves have gotten a little stronger, the hair has grown somewhat, but there are no drastic changes. In almost every way she is the same...except for the eyes. It is the eyes, she realizes. The eyes have changed: they no longer reflect the girl who boarded the Boston-bound Amtrak train five years ago, leaving Inwood and all of New York City behind to come study English and dance. The strangeness of these eyes summon that day,

five years ago, when she looked at herself in the bathroom mirror at Penn Station: her eyes were aglimmer, glowing, ready. And now? Two wells of black ashes, barely redolent of what she was, barely resemblant even of who she has become, smolder back at her. Unable to break her gaze, she feels the room around her shrinking, the air chilling. Maybe, she whispers, I should go home. Darrell's knocking rouses her from her spell.

"Hey baby, wha's up?"

"Nothing Darrell, I'm just tired."

"You always tired..."

"Tonight I'm extremely tired...K'Lisha was out again today so we all had to cover for her and it was so fucking busy...my arms hurt, my back hurts, my feet are killing me..."

"You musta pulled in some pretty good tips though?" Darrell jibes, which Lelia blandly returns with a smile. That's the only thing he cares about, sweeping her hair back from her forehead. He follows her into the bedroom, where they collapse onto the bed. Darrell peels off his leather flightjacket, pulls Lelia into his arms. She wriggles away from his side, so he pulls an opaque grey bag from inside his jacket's lining, then waves it above her supine form.

"Too tired for som'a this?"

She nods no, then closes her eyes again. Maybe I have mono, she tells herself, maybe I'm really sick. K'Lisha got mono: she was running herself in the ground like I am, and Mama always said the easiest way to tell that a man is sick or dying is to look at his eyes, and I can't recognize myself anymore, and...Darrell is rummaging through her closet, trying to fish out the bong. Something inside the closet crashes, followed by a burst of laughter from Darrell: "Found it!" I quit school to dance, not live like this. While Darrell cleans himself up into the bathroom, she brings to her nostrils the races of wintergreen on her fingertips, allowing the fragrance to take root there, to flower slowly in the narrows of her nose. "When life decide to leave you, it leave the eyes first."

--Look, like I said, I think you have a unique style,

but you need some traditional work, so this is

what I'm gonna do...

--Unhuh...

--So what I'm going to do is put you in MY advanced class...

--What? Thank you...but...I have one problem...I don't think that I can afford...

--Look, don't worry about that...I'll take care of everything...when you're done with my class, we'll see how things work out and...

--Oh my god, thank you so much Mr. Nickerson...thank you so much...

--You're familiar with Joan Linney right...well, she's a good friend of mine, so when you've polished yourself up some, we can explore that option as well...

--Joan Linney!? Oh my God, I used to beg my mother to take me to see the Joan Linney troupe dance!...oh, Mr. Nickerson...

--Horace...and it's no problem...

The sour, funky smoke of marijuana replaces the wintergreen, opening Lelia's eyes. Darrell is lying on her left side, a bong in his right hand, a flickering match in his left. His eyes closed tight, he places the flame to the bowl of the bong, he sucks his cheeks in, thins his nose, pitches his throat forward, inhales. A moan of pleasure. She waits for him to hand it to her, but he takes another hit. He readies the bowl again, repeating fastidiously each motion. After two or three hits, Darrell passes the bong to her. Holding it with both hands, she fills the mouth of the stem with her lips, then watches as he brings the flame slowly to the bowl. As she readies to inhale, a pang of nausea seizes her. Maybe I really am sick. Maybe I need to go home. Maybe...she inhales the dry, heavy smoke.

"I'ma put on some music, a'ight?"

"Go ahead, sure..." Lying back, Lelia steadies the bong upright against her hip with her left hand. Soon, the voice of Marvin Gaye spreads throughout the room. "...Mercy, mercy me/ah things ain't what they used to be, no no..." Darrell slides onto the bed beside her, this time snuggling up into her right side. His hand slinks across her waist, rests for a moment on her left hip, then gropes for the bong. As she hands it to him, she feels his tongue dancing around her right cheek, curling over her chin, then darting

away. "Mercy, mercy me..." She hears him take another hit, after which he starts singing along to the song.

"Darrell, what would you think about me going back to New York?..."

"What?"

"New York...I feel like it's time for me to go back..."

"Come on Lelia, be for real..."

"I am being for real. I think I'm ready..."

"Ready...ready for what? Ready to get dogged out some more by your parents, who ain't said a word to you since you dropped out of school? Ready to get dogged out by somebody like that muthafuckin' dance teacher, who's the main reason you ain't taking your dance classes any more? Ready to get dogged out by that whole fucked-up city? I mean, baby, where you gone live, what you gone do? Ain't nobody there gone lift a finger to help you. You ready to starve?"

"You promised you wouldn't bring Horace up again..."

"Lelia, I'm just looking out for you...there ain't shit there for you. Look at what you got here: you got your own place, you'll be able to start back with classes soon enough, and you got me..."

"Okay, Darrell, okay..." As he gets up to change the record, Lelia rolls onto her stomach, burying her face in the comforter which, like the slippers, was a going-away gift from her grandmother. In this warm, cotton grave, she repeats her mother's words to herself: "When life decide to leave you, it leave the eyes first." Choking back a cough, she bites down on the thick fabric and cries.

--So where were you last night?

--At my waitressing job...

--I stopped by there, you weren't there...WHERE WERE YOU?...

--Look, Horace, I'm here to take my lesson...

--Where the FUCK were you...were you with somebody else?



I Can't Read Anymore

(On Toni Morrison)

I can't read anymore

Not one more line

Not another word.

Why/how does she make you feel

like a hungry child,

Needing, craving

the nourishment of her words?

And why do those words stab you in the heart

and bring fire to your eyes?

With all due respect,

I've got enough pain and problems

in my own life

and in everyone else's life around me;

I don't need Sula's or Sethe's

or even little Pecola's.

This lady has a way

of making me see and feel

more

than any history book could;

mingling facts with fiction and feeling,

cursing us with fear,

and blessing us with knowledge.

Her words are legacies-exhausting our souls, yet enriching us

with the understanding of our misunderstood selves;

sharing with us her perception and insight

through her powerful pen.

...But as for tonite,

I can't read another line.

Not one more word.

Thea Spain Clark

Phila., PA

Wintergreen

Continued from page 21

--No, no...I got off early, so I...

--You're lying to me, I really do...

--Look Horace, I don't want to argue...let's just forget it for now...

--Forget it? You...

--Horace, please, let's just...

--No, WHORE, let's forget it for GOOD...get out of my class, get out of this building, I don't ever want to see your ass around here again...

Darrell drops onto the bed, beginning a slow crawl onto Lelia's back. She knows what he wants. The saxophone of Najee calls out its assent. Before Lelia can wipe the tears from her eyes, Darrell has begun kissing the back of her neck, drily first, then gradually circling with his tongue the naps of the nape on her neck. His arms envelope her tightly around her waist. My God, I

feel sick, Lelia says to herself. His pelvis starts to grind on the backs of her legs, sliding up onto her behind. My body aches all over, I just can't take all this. Baby, he purrs. Babyeee. This apartment, this city, these men. Darrell grinds with the fervor, his grip around her loosens, he searches for her breasts. I don't recognize myself anymore, my eyes have gone blank, I'm dying. He is squeezing her breasts now, squeezing, his body rolling around her and over her, hard against her behind. Oooh Baybyeee. Why shouldn't I go home? Why shouldn't I try to dance again. His hands gripping, his teeth gnawing. There is nothing for me here, nothing. He is tugging her skirt now, slipping off her blouse, trying to remove his clothes at the same time. And even if I'm not good enough to join a New York company, things couldn't be worse than here. His hands claw at her brassiere, scratching, pinching:

"Come on, baby, help me out. Take thing off..."

"Darrell, I'm too tired, I feel sick."

"I'ma make you feel better...come on, Lelia..."

"Why you wanna be like this, baby...come on...come on..."

"Darrell, get off me...I told you I..."

"What the fuck?!...shit...okay, okay." Darrell rolls off her, onto the bed beside her, sits up. "You don't feel good, fine. I'll leave you alone. I know when to leave you alone. I ain't Horace." Buckling his pants, he heads for the bathroom. As she curls her knees up to her stomach, she feels the room around her growing even smaller and colder. Darrell comes back into the room, avoiding her gaze altogether. He fires up the bong one last time, this time taking a hit so deep that he drops the bong in a fit of coughing.

Darrell rolls off her, onto the bed beside her, sits up. "You don't feel good, fine. I'll leave you alone. I know when to leave you alone. I ain't Horace."

and his feet slide in and out of it. I'm getting out of here, I cannot take this anymore. Darrell puts on his leather jacket, pats his backside to make sure his wallet is there, then heads for the door. When he reaches the threshold of the door, he turns around.

"Can you spot me thirty dollars till Friday?"

"Look in my black purse..." Re-entering the bedroom, he goes over to the dresser, fishes around in the purse. After a few moments, during which he says nothing and Lelia says nothing, he pulls out what looks, from Lelia's curled up view, like at least two twenties. He coughs again, using the motion to slide the bills into his pocket, then turns and heads out.

"Call you tomorrow..."

She does not answer. Closing her eyes, she digs her face into the comforter. Her nose one with the soothing fabric, she tries to dispel the



present by falling asleep.

--Looking good, looking good...

--Horace...what are you doing here...

--I heard from the grapevine that you were taking class here...

--Yeah, I found out about this place from a friend...at least I can afford it...

--Just watching you here, if you keep up at this rate, Joan Linney will be flying you down to New York City first class...

--Thanks...

--Look, Lelia, what I wanted to say is, you're really coming along...and...and if you're interested, my troupe is looking for another dancer right now...

--What?

--We're..if you want a place in my troupe...I...

--No thank you, Horace...no, I'm not interested...I'm...

Look, I've got to get back to my class...good luck...

Lelia gets up from the bed and grabbing a dirty sock, which she recognizes as one of Darrell's, wipes up the fetid water. She picks up the bong, the burnt matches, and the matchbook, placing them carefully in the trashcan beside her bed. She takes off the Najee album, replacing it with Cassandra Wilson. When the music has started, she goes over to her closet. Standing on her tip-toes, she pulls down an empty black suitcase, which she drags into the middle of the room, to the foot of her bed. Once she has unzipped it, she picks up the little bottle of liniment, turning to face the oval mirror on her dresser. As she draws her bangs from her forehead, she stares at her reflection for a second, then closes her eyes. In the dark space before her, illuminated by the sweet timbre of Wilson's voice, she begins to see the white twinkling of the lights that line the George Washington Bridge; the reddish-blue sparks shooting up from the tracks in the 181st Station; the solemn, pink-white glow of the streetlamps on Dyckman Street. New York City. Inwood. Before her now, the still surface of the wading pool at the High Bridge Pool. Her reflection, an image she recognizes, calls her to

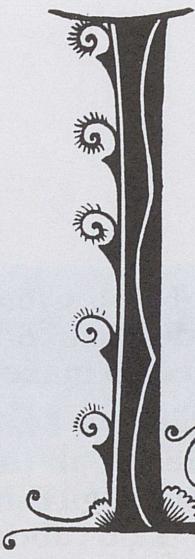
jump in. Before she can even flinch, the surface of the water has become the sweat glistening on the arms and legs of Alyda Sanchez, the principle dancer in Joan Linney's late-Spring production of "Canada." The bodies bow before her, swaying in and out, arching to and fro, arms fluttering past her face, the legs sweeping out before her, each movement melding toward a greater spell. As she stares, each flutter of hand, each turn of hip transforms the glistening flesh into the slow, insistent shafts of sunlight that gird her grandmother's backporch greenhouse. Her eyes cross the bright grid of those flowers, the columns and rows of zinnias, azaleas, sweet-peas, and mums, settling finally on the cardboard box in the furthest corner, a rectangular bed of loam and verdure, which her eyes and her nose recognize without a moment's deliberation: wintergreen. When she lifts her lids, the eyes staring back at her reveal a soft glimmer, a steady flickering, which neither she nor the mirror can deny. As she turns to put the liniment in the suitcase, she feels the room around her begin to swell, to warm. She utters breathlessly what her eyes have just told her: I am going home.

INVITATION

- OPEN FORUM
- SPEAK YOUR MIND
- SHARE YOUR VIEWS
- WHAT'S IN A NAME?

For over a decade, the Black community has been called "*Minority*." You are invited to share your views on either the appropriateness or impropriety of this title in our Autumn'91 *Home & Community* issue. Please limit comments to 200 words maximum. Views must be neatly typewritten and must be received by July 15 to be included. Comments may be edited for length and clarity. Materials cannot be returned. Address your comments to: Open Forum, *Shooting Star Review*, 7123 Race Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15208-1424.

*Every other Friday
in a small steel town
Sweet Aunt
you played God --took pay checks
from steelworkers
when the whistle sounded
paychecks for sex
to buy expensive purses
fancy shoes
keep the lights on
the phone dialing out
And, a few hours later
they or their wives
would come to you
pleading, begging
for baby clothes
the rent money
the way to pay the doctor
And, you would stand there
laughing or perhaps,
sometimes
crying
behind your false eye lashes--deciding
half
or whole
some or none
figuring out whether tears
or threats
or anything could woo you
Knowing, well aware
in two weeks*



*L*esser Religions

*every other Friday
you would sit
on the porch again--your hair freshly done
your body sweet with
the scent of channel
rouge strategically placed --and soon be able to
reek vengeance, turn away or--wipe away the tears
or give more than you received --like a woman-god
with no other power
might be air to do.*

Romella D. Kitchens
Pittsburgh, PA

It wasn't so surprising that Pop Clem was on that cart waiting for to take all those who wanted to make it down the road to Triville and those who just plain wanted to make it on home.

But it was mighty surprising to Mariah when *she* got off that cart when it stopped in Triville. Took the feet patterns she drew of her four living children up to a girlish-looking white woman tippity-tapping every word she said about her children, her husband, herself, on a machine called a typewriter. Said to that woman, "I came before you because my children needs some shoes."

"What they wearing now?"

"Best I could get for them, but they clean wore out."

"Where'd you get 'em before? What did you say your name was?"

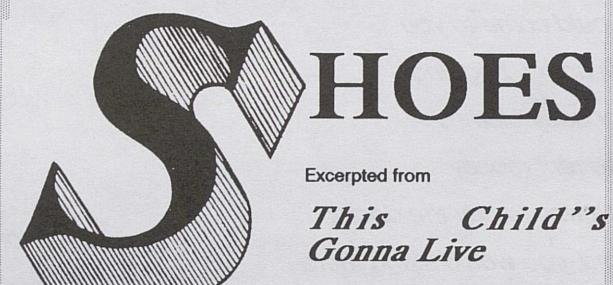
"Mariah Upshur is my name. I got the shoes before from the second-hand store back of the drugstore in Calvertown."

"How come you didn't get 'em there today? I hear tell you all was up there in Calvertown spending money free as a black mammy's milk flows."

"Ran out of money. Had to get my William a new overcoat." Her voice felt like rising, but it couldn't quite make it. Said to the lady, "Miss ... Miss ..."

"Mrs. Cramston is my name, Mariah!"

"Now what I'm trying to tell you is that Santa Claus done promised my children shoes...."



Well, that Mrs. Cramston reared back in her chair. Bucked her hard brown eyes at Mariah. Said, "Welfare don't give out free clothes to nothing but the poor...."

Mariah said nothing, nothing, nothing! Until that bitch screamed at her, "You're a liar! You do have some shoes for Christmas. I can tell by the way you're twitching same as if you wants to break down and pee...."

Mariah said, "I couldn't buy no shoes! Didn't have that much money."

Woman said, "Prove it to me."

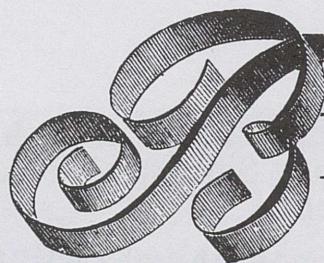
"How am I gonna prove it?"

Woman said, "We'll be down to help you prove it. Can't trust most of you niggers worth a damn. But *we'll* be down!"

Mariah said, "When?" Straps on her pocketbook cut deep into her hands. She was clutching them so tight.

Woman smirked. "Some time *after* Santa Claus comes." And looking away from Mariah, she hollered, "Next ... next!"

Mariah's feet seemed like they couldn't lift her weight as she made it back to the cart. Wished she could take her pocketbook and lam that woman in the face! Wished she could take one of her blue pills and drop it in her drinking water. Poison the living shit out of her. Wished ... Stared at the poor-assed land lining the road all the way back to Tangierneck, and the women babbling about their Christmas plans. But most of all staring at the Messenger who nobody on the cart seemed to see but her. Who nobody heard but her, saying, *Cheat 'em, Mariah, when they come down to make you prove it. Hide all your things in the cornhouse. Get your children some shoes before you join my kingdom*

 THE
BRASS BED

Excerpted from the novel *The Brass Bed*
by Pearl Cleage

The lineage runs through the women. Because of the children. And the bed. Or maybe that's saying the same thing twice. Or once removed. No matter. It was a lot of different things for the men. Mostly land. Sometimes gambling. But for the women, it was always because of the children that they made a move or didn't. Left a man, or stayed. Their choices were more limited.

The problem is in getting ahead of the story, or refusing to get behind it, or thinking there is no story. Begin at the beginning.

It was 1885, give or take a year on either side. There were thirteen sisters and their mother had been born a slave. Abbie and Jennie were the oldest and the youngest, respectively, and they lived outside of Montgomery, Alabama. Their mother was a seamstress and they spent their days bent over bolts of New York silk, translating the latest in Paris styles into an acceptable Alabama facsimile for the genteel white ladies who oohed and aahed over the fineness of their stitches and bemoaned the rising cost of Southern chic.

It was hard work and their mother demanded silence to ensure concentration. After a few years of this, Abbie, in a fit of passion and defiance, married herself off to a riverboat gambler with a dimple in his chin and a cruel mouth who beat her, threw her children into the street and locked the door behind them. He traveled the Mississippi bringing home not money for food and children's clothing, but trunks of satin dresses, thick golden rings, diamond studs and bottles of expensive cognac.

In a poker game on one such trip, he badly beat a hard-eyed man without a sense of humor, who waited until he slept and then slit his throat from ear to ear. Frightened and alone, Abbie became the mistress of the town sheriff, who bought her a small house on the outskirts of town so that he could visit her in safety, away from the eyes of his white family. She felt safe there, until the sheriff was killed by a man who made his living selling moonshine whiskey.

Desperate and weary, Abbie went to live with her sister who, by this time, had married a musician, presented him with two daughters and watched him die of stab wounds at a church barbecue that got out of hand. It was too much. Abbie and Jennie, clutching their few belongings and their children, fled Alabama in the midst of summer Yellow Fever quarantine and settled, breathless and amazed, in Detroit, Michigan.

Jennie soon returned to Alabama, frightened more of the North and its grime than the South and its fevers. She married one last time to a small, very jealous Italian who hid himself on the street, watching her pass undetected, making sure she walked alone. He fathered her last child, Alice, who contracted polio as an infant and carried a small, twisted leg as a reminder for the rest of her life.

Jennie's oldest daughter, Fannie, was a bright girl who helped out in the grocery store owned by an uncle, once removed. She was well known in the neighborhood for her ability to add long columns of numbers in her head,

rapidly and without error. She remembered many years later the off-color remarks of the white men who came to the store to tease and transact business with the slender, green-eyed black girl. "I would just press my lips together," she remembered, "and look North."

Looking North with the same determination was Mershall C. Graham, a hard-working, sober man who was looking for a good woman to share his life and bear his children. Fannie promised to wait for him, and he went North, to Detroit, at Abbie's urging, found the job at Ford's that he would keep for the next forty years, and saved his money so he could send for his fiancee.

One day in the midst of his waiting, he passed by two policemen setting furniture out on the street from a recently raided house of ill repute. They set a bed down in front of Mershell, swore softly at each other and went back inside. He had not been in the market for a bed, but this one, *this* one, was made of thick highly polished brass and when Mershell saw it, magnificently blocking his path home, he reached into his pocket, peeled off five one-dollar bills and rescued the bed from an unknown fate. He soon sent for Fannie and went about settling down to raise a family, being careful, of course, never to tell his wife that the fine brass bed in which all four of her children were conceived had first been home to the more practiced moves of big city prostitutes and their johns.

Shell and Fannie had four children: two sons and two daughters. One son died at the age of three of Scarlet Fever and the other was run over by a truck a few blocks from home and died in the street calling his mother.

Mershell and the youngest daughter were once hit by a train which he could not see coming because of one blind eye, the result of a hunting accident. His daughter, who saw the train coming, was too embarrassed to mention it to him for fear his feelings might be hurt because he could not see it for himself and remove her from danger. No matter. They were not hurt and walked home, they were still very much alive. Yes, yes. They were very much alive.

Jennie missed her sister and her daughter and soon moved to Detroit with her two remaining daughters, Daisy Pearl and Alice. They found

work as seamstresses in a fine fur store downtown sewing purple silk linings in midnight sable coats.

In poor health now, Jennie kept their house for them and spent the last years of her life fussing and giving orders from a wheelchair. When Jennie died, she left a space in the lives of her spinster daughters that they filled with her memory and regular Wednesday night cards with a few female friends.

One evening, Alice and Daisy had dinner, played a gentle game of dominos, drank a small glass of sweet red wine between them, and retired to the double bed they had shared since they were children. In the morning, Alice found Daisy sleeping more heavily than usual, but did wake her. Two days later, she called Fannie, asking in a whisper for her advice on the matter. When the funeral home came for the body, the small house was sickly sweet with Alice's efforts to divert the truth with a dark blue bottle of *Evening in Paris* cologne.

Alice moved in with Fannie after that, but she was never the same. She had become what she dreaded most, the spinster sister come to live alone in an upstairs room, memories taped to the edges of her mirror. But she spared herself that loneliness. She fled from that upstairs room by refusing to believe that she was there at all. Family dinners became tense with Alice giggling at someone no one else could see. Alice, muffling laughter in her hand, whispering: "Please don't make me laugh! You know they can't hear you!"

After awhile, they put her in an institution and visited her every other Sunday, until Fannie died and then it didn't seem to matter much. Alice didn't live long after that. Her death passed through the family with barely noticeable murmurs.

Jennie Turner is my great grandmother. Abbie Allen my great-great aunt. Mershell and Fannie Graham my maternal grandparents. All gone now. Except what they remembered and told. And except the brass bed from the house of ill repute. It now belongs to me.

SOMETHING STIRRING

As a teenager I spent a lot of time by myself, waking very early in the morning and bicycling around town before it got too hot. The flat, solid heat was piled so high at corners I could barely ride my bike through it even at dawn. I slept all day and then at dusk would incur my mother's displeasure by mowing the lawn while she drank her cocktail on the porch, disturbing the exclusive tranquility wrapped tightly around herself.

"Are you joining me?" I kept expecting her to ask: but she never did, and I'd roar off in someone's car.

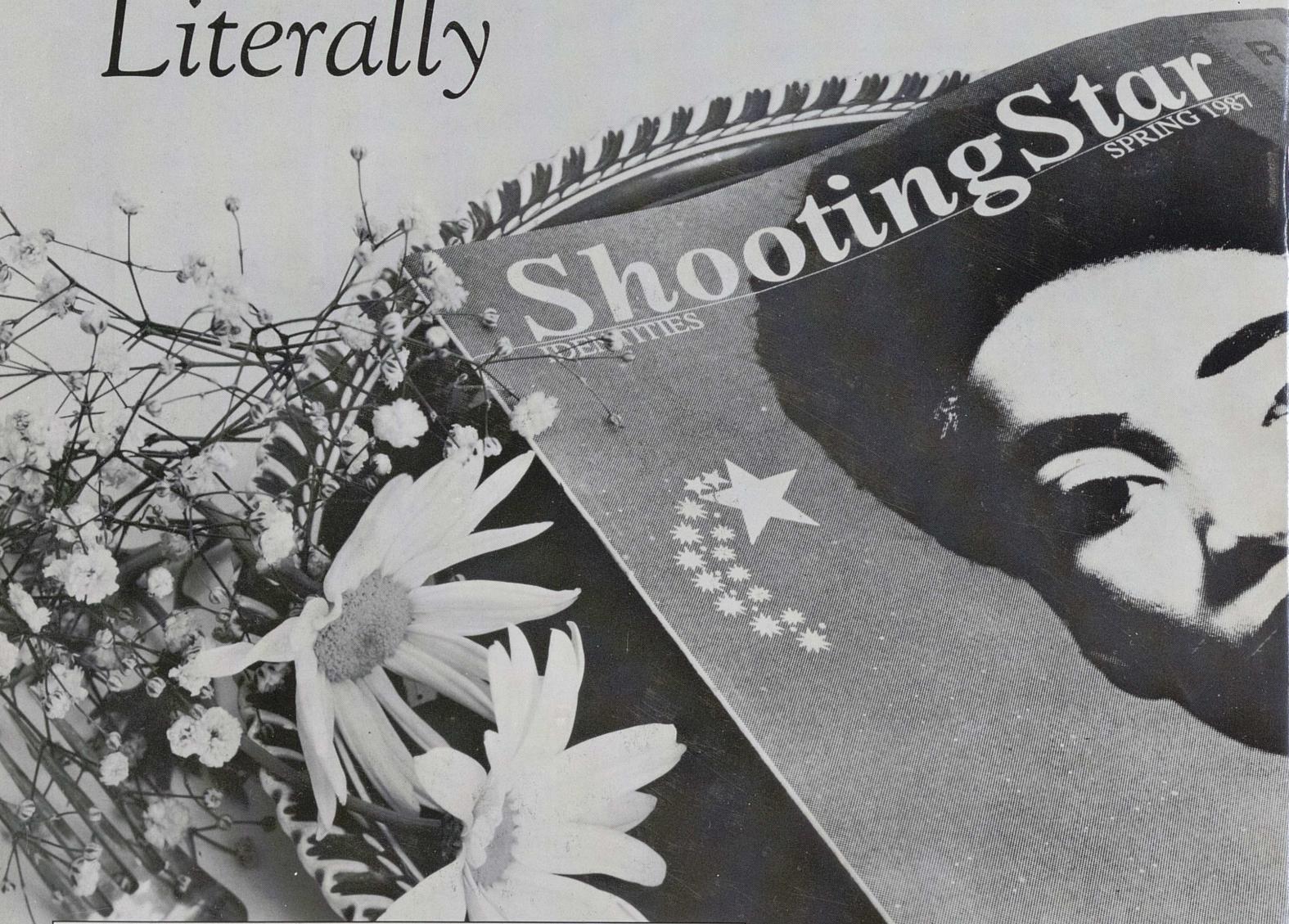
The air did not move, but the forward thrust of body, bike or car gave the illusion of breeze and an impression of there being life outside: green, live things, and wind, even in August, when nothing in that town moved. Even then, I felt something stirring. Wait for nightfall, the air said: you are alive.

But in my mother's house dust sat in the air like fat, ugly ghouls perched upon nothing, wearing the faces of all that was wrong. No wind ever came in; no one ever came in; even the sound of mowers on a still day could not penetrate what we were not saying to each other.

Pamela Pratt

New York, NY

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