

ShootingStar

Summer, 1989

JUSTICE Injustice

Features in this issue:

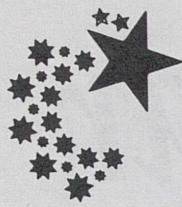
Fiction by Woodie King, Jr.

Reginald McKnight—Winner of 1988 Drue Heinz Award for Fiction

Richard Wright

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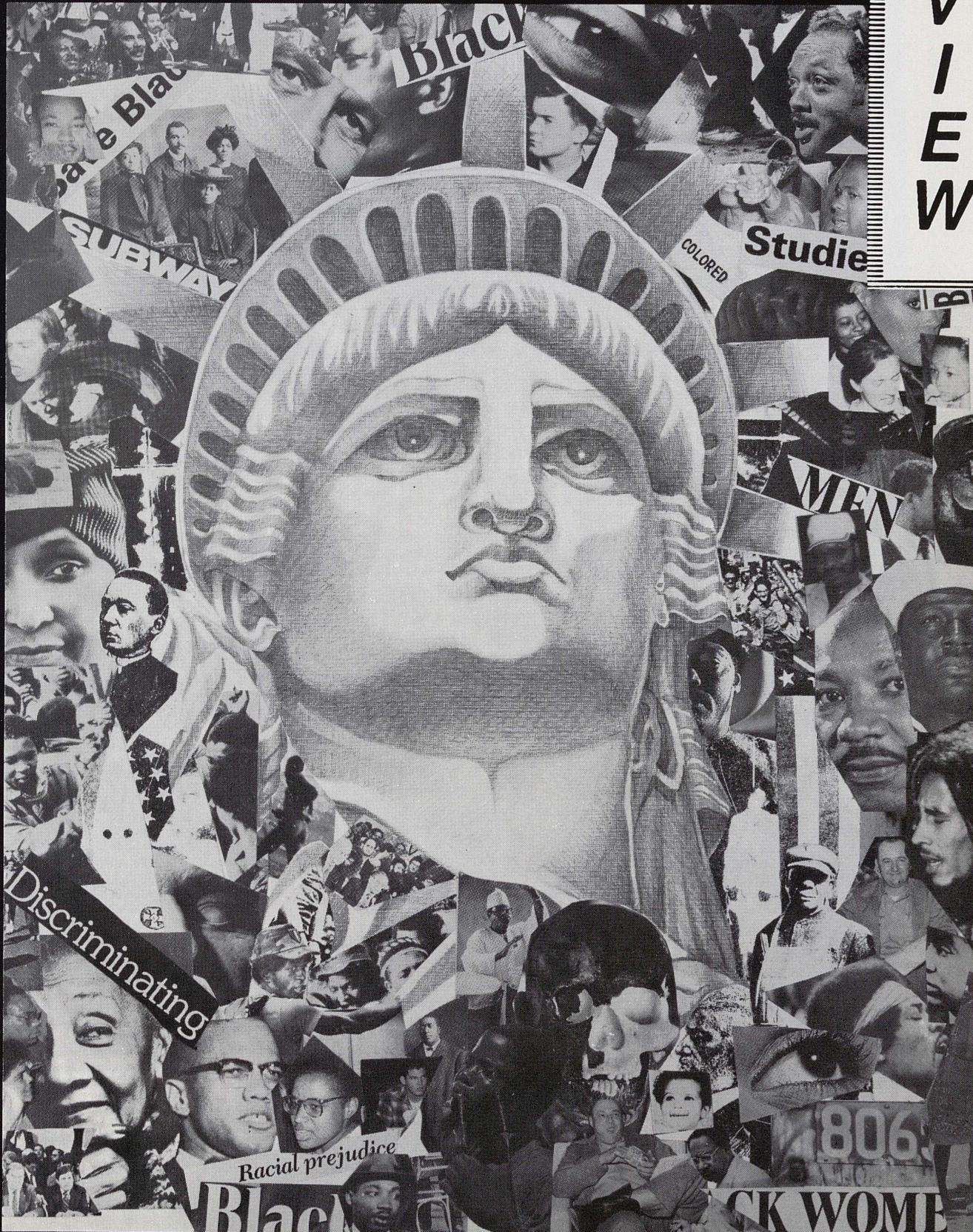
ShootingStar

ISSN 0892-1407

Black Literary Magazine



Features in
this issue
Fiction by
Woodie King
Reginald
McKnight
Richard Wright



Summer, 1989

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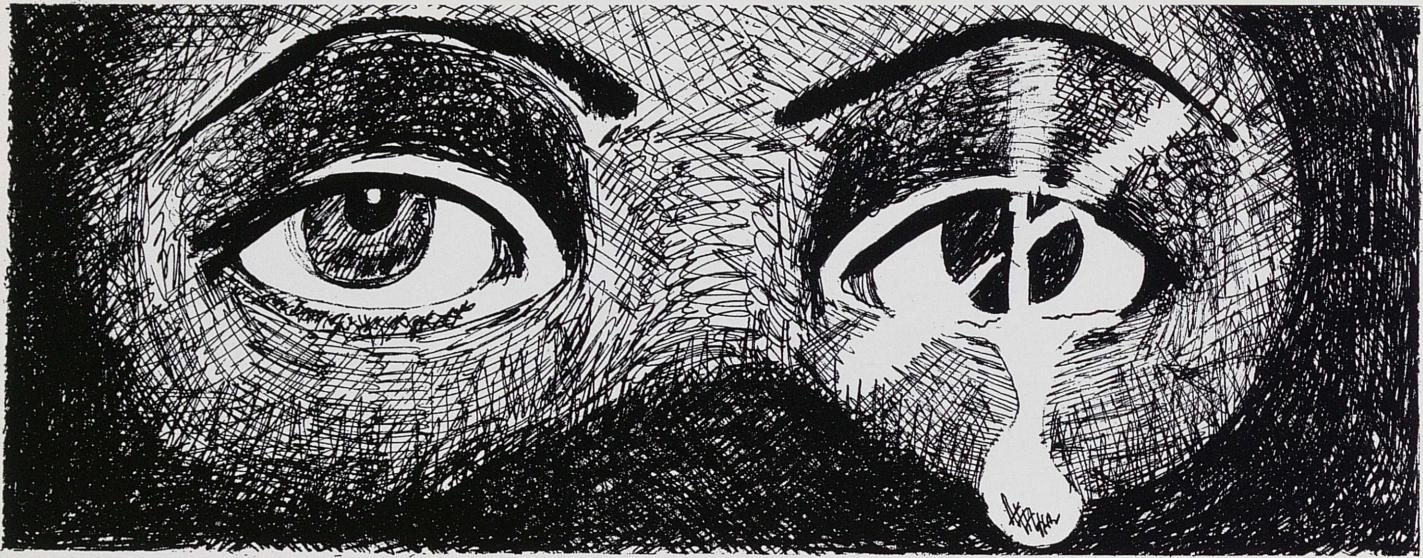


ILLUSTRATION BY YVETTE GANT

NOW I UNDERSTAND how my mother died

They worked her
Into the mud.
They beat her
Head into the sinks
And into the tiles
Of their workhouses.
They slit her,
Belly up,
And dressed her
Like a deer
After the almighty hunt.

Now, I understand how
My mother died.
In the lie
That surrounded her labor,
Her honest-honest labor
That boiled production
And brought it all to a head
For their profit
And for her dead spirit.

Drained of blood,
And no one to cover
Her white, white bones,
And no one to wipe her brow
Over her sunken eyes.
This is how

My mother died.
“Honest work for honest pay.”
This lie is white hot,
But it won’t burn
Forever.
In her breast
Forever.

Now my mother flashes
Before my eyes,
Before my eyes,
Working her ass
Her ass off
To maintain her room
Her little, little room
In a project
On the eastside of Detroit
1950s
Just after my birth.

“Honest pay for honest work.”
This lie can’t live
Forever.
Forever.
Forever.

And when she died,
And when her A.D.C. checks stopped,

And when they didn’t have to give
Her money,
And when they missed her labor,
Her cheap-cheap labor,
Then they remembered
Her part of their lie.
It keeps

Forever.
Forever.
Before my eyes
She flashes
She smolders
In their kitchens
In their ovens
In her sweat and labor.
It won’t live.
It won’t live.
It won’t
Live.
It lives.
It won’t live.
It lives.
It lives.
It lives.
It lives.
Forever.

FOUNDER'S STATEMENT



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Production of *Shooting Star Review* is supported by grants from:

- ★ The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
- ★ The Pittsburgh Foundation
- ★ Westinghouse Foundation
- ★ Heinz Corporation
- ★ And the generous financial and volunteer support of the many who believe in this mission.

*African-American People
are more than a minority.*

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. is a non-profit corporation that exists to promote artistic and educational outlets for expression of the African-American experience through production and distribution of publications, video and other media.

Welcome to *Shooting Star Review's* "Justice or Injustice" issue. This is one of the strongest issues *Shooting Star* has offered during its three year history. The following pages provide thought-provoking and deeply meaningful examples of how creative writing can go beyond art for art's sake. I'm also pleased that Dr. Lloyd Bell of the University of Pittsburgh has shared the following introductory thoughts on freedom and justice...

Sandra Gould Ford

***Justice
Ain't
Always
What You
See***

Enslaved minds or slavery no longer exists in the technical sense that Black people are owned or defined as being someone's property. The making of justice clearly has led Black people from being chained physically, however, one wonders whether the chains remain wrapped around our minds. I refer to slavery as a historical era in the Black experience, when Black people's lives were totally defined by the white slave master. Unfortunately, too many Black people have identified with the values of the oppressor and have begun objectifying each other. In other words, for a great many Black folks, freedom simply means to adopt a value system like white folks rather than beginning to define our existence from a Black perspective.

If I am Black, should I adopt the notion of competition which often means to win at any cost or should I enter into cooperative ventures with other Black people so we begin to "look out" for one another thereby extending each other's existence? If Black folks looked out for one another and treated each other as extended family members, 90% of the Black men in this country would not be killed by other Black men. Dope dealers would not use their nephews, nieces, younger brothers and sons to run their drugs. Men would not make babies before they can be responsible fathers, etc.

The "making of justice" as defined from a Black perspective means that no Black individual would use or manipulate another Black person for their own selfish survival. When a Black person uses another person, they display a total commitment to an "I" orientation process during which an individual employs negative survival tactics to advance their own wishes, i.e., getting over on others by using the con-ethic and stealing or killing others for money.

It is unfortunate that many Black folks have identified with the oppressors who enslaved Black folks in order to meet their own selfish ends. Young Black males should look out for senior citizens; not grab their purses or jewelry. Young Black men and women should adopt two, three or four senior citizens and visit them or run errands for them, etc. In other words, young people would "look out for" their elders. Brothers would see that no harm would befall any Black woman or child for they would be the warriors who would defend all who needed to be protected. The "making of justice" should not lead us to be naive about what it means to be Black in white America. The "making of justice" obligates us as Black people to study our roots, our history so that when we meet racism in the work place or external society, we will not become disillusioned and suffer anxiety attacks and a sense that we have been abandoned. The "making of justice" means that rather than assimilate, we would earnestly reach for and become Black and beauty-filled so that we will not destroy, steal from, abuse or verbally make fun of one another.

Furthermore, rather than segregating ourselves one from another by class, color and sex, we would find ways to come together and begin to define what's good for us rather than always thinking that the "other people" got the best of everything so we "gotta" be like them. Remember, they started the segregation, this objectifying of others (Indians, Blacks). There was a song entitled the "Mean Green" which in essence said: don't love money too much or it will make you a cold-blooded killer. The songs the "Wild Wild West" and "D.C. ain't Dodge City" are rap songs that try to warn us that we don't have to see a western epic to see killings, but rather we need just ride thru the Black community to see shootouts at the "O.K. Corral."

I don't want to act as if nothing positive is happening in the Black community. However, I must say that I believe we need to examine our value system so that we commit to using only positive survival tactics.

If we believe Black is beauty-filled, we will do nothing to destroy it and everything to enhance it. When Black people begin to strive to be positive enhancers of each, then justice will truly "be."

Lloyd Bell, Ph.D.
Pittsburgh, PA

THEME FOR ENGLISH

II

"The instructor said,
'Go home and write a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you
Then it will be true.'"

Langston Hughes Theme for English B

By R.M. Crockett

I wonder if it is that easy?
I am 33, born in West Philadelphia and moved to suburban Washington, D.C. when I was very young.
There I learned others lived quite differently than I and that the seeds of hate also were planted in the homes of the rich and bloomed in the minds and on the tongues of my classmates who lived there.
So I went to other homes and I ate from their plates and I said "thank you" and "yes, maam" and was invited again.
I have been to seven schools, three colleges, around the world and now here to Indianapolis.
I am the only Black student in your Wednesday night class.

Winter is not the best of seasons for me.
I feel out of place as I make my way like a shadow through this White snow-covered campus.
Beneath lumbering Locust trees, I retrace my steps along winding rivers of cement that lead away from this place.
No one speaks when I pass them... maybe because shadows have no voice, no substance, no fear.

I used to walk with a classmate to his dorm at the edge of campus talking about Jazz music... you know Wes Montgomery was from "Nap Town."
I would tell him about my problems with the landlord and he would tell me how he was going to make his fortune, but he would never come to my apartment, which really isn't that far of a walk.
He said the streets weren't "safe" at night for either of us. Before class I would line up my best albums near the stereo and throw pillows in a circle around the coffee table.
My Nigerian prince, carved on an ivory throne, guarded by American Literature, Sociology, Western Civilization, notebooks and reports sat patiently for our arrival, but my friend never came and I walk alone, as I always have,

through the unsafe streets of this city to my sanctuary on the second floor.

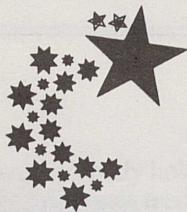
It's not easy to know what is true for you or me. I guess I am what others think I am and sometimes that hurts.
You and others like you say that I am a good student and that someday I, and others like me, will lead the way to a better America.
But the truth I seek in school is not the truth that exists for me when the police knock on my door.

With a face as black as a moonless night and eyes that mirror the rape of a continent, who will listen, who will really understand that I come here for the same reasons you do.

When I close my eyes at night, I dream the same dreams as most people my age.
I like to eat Italian food by candlelight, play Boogie Woogie on the piano, and take color pictures of my friends.
I like parties and I like my privacy.
I believe in hard work and sacrifice and that birth and ambition are not enough to truly make it in this country.

Like James Baldwin said, it is hard to be born, to find work, to feed a family, to live, but why must I carry the additional burden of being Black in America?

So, will my page be Black?
If I am true, it will be.
Sometimes you have bad feelings about me and sometimes I do not like you, Mrs. Sims.
But this is America and a part of you is as Black as me.
Although you are White and know what freedom has done for you, I am your other side.
This is my page for English II.



Shooting Star

REVIEW

SHOOTING STAR REVIEW
ISSN 0892-1407

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C O N T E N T S

ESSAYS

Justice Ain't Always What You See by Lloyd Bell	3
Theme for English II by R.M. Crockett	4
Rear of a Bus Named Desire by Brenda Quant	12

FEATURED ARTIST

Stevens Carter	22
--------------------------	----

FICTION

Rebirth by Reginald McKnight	6
Listen to the Wind Blow by Woodie King, Jr.	16
Ah'll Beatcha Making Money by Zora Neale Hurston	24
Long Black Song by Richard Wright	26
Wisdom Tooth by Carol Dixon	32

POETRY

Now I Understand how my mother died, by M. Liebler	2
If Beale Street Could Talk, by Franz Douskey	9
Hanging Trees, by Shirley Hailstock	11
It's That Time of Year Again, by Richard Kittell	12
Butterfly, by Gloria Starling	13
East Lansing Blues, by McArthur Gunter	14
Dead Land Red, by C.E. Hull	15
Uluru, by C.E. Hull	15
Urban America, by Mondo	18
Letter from Chicago, 1988, by Li Min Hua	29
Wednesday, by Mondo	30
How It Continues to Flourish, by Peter Murphy	36
Blues Dream, by Franz Douskey	43

REVIEW

And We Are Not Saved	40
--------------------------------	----

COVER ART BY DARNELL LOPER

Special Thank You is extended to Weidenfeld & Nicholson, publishers *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember* for granting permission to reprint excerpts from some of the many compelling slave narratives.

REBIRTH

Reginald McKnight



Treadwell had not seen a lynching for many years. The souvenirs his father and uncles had deftly sliced from the charred bodies of those black men had long ago disintegrated in the jars of vinegar in which they had been stored. He had thought they would last forever, but as he grew older, he learned that nothing lasts forever. Everything disintegrates, no matter how permanent it seems. At some lynchings, all the flesh would burn to smoking ash, and the only suitable souvenirs the men could collect were

blackened teeth and bone fragments. His Uncle Pres had given him a gold-filled molar one, but he hadn't taken care of it and it split into a dozen pieces, leaving only the gold filling. The filling became part of the wedding band he had paid a jeweler to make for his first wife. But she left him after fourteen bad, fruitless years, and he never saw the band again.

As his old truck rumbled its way toward his home, he felt a bottomless melancholy for the days when his arms and legs were as tough as rubber-coated cable, and he could hold onto



things, he could scarcely hold a coffee cup, a razor, or a screwdriver steady, his hands trembled so. And he felt odd shiftings around in his bones. Sometimes they were painful; sometimes there was no pain at all, just unnervingly silent popping and groaning, like stepping on ripe chinaberries in autumn. He felt, at times, as though his body were floating, naked and senseless, in a vinegar jar. His hair soaking to a dead silver-white, his eyes so paled over they couldn't keep focus on the color and shape of things, his ears turning all sound into a muted hiss.

And his mind worked so strangely these days. Sometimes it did him no more good than a seventy-year-old souvenir jar swirling with fragments of what was once whole. Past, present, and desire, all cast about in orbiting flakes. His head would hurt something awful and his bottom lip would tremble as his mind's eye would strain to focus on some single, unwavering image. He would try to hold onto it as it were a life-saver, hoping it would carry him to some place firm and dry. Most usually it was the memory of the last lynching he had seen that pulled things back into a whole again. It was so real: the pink and yellow flames, the stink of gasoline and cooking flesh, his heart drubbing big and loud in his temples. He would hold onto that image and pretty soon all the other images, all the other things he had seen, felt, tasted, understood, would settle into place. His head wouldn't hurt so. His lip wouldn't tremble.

He wondered why and how things had changed so. Why younger men like Myron, who claimed to hate blacks no less than he, seemed almost revolted by the idea of a lynching. "Where in hell-fire," he thought, "have all the men gone?" His stomach knotted at the thought of the conversation he had had with Myron today. "That no good niggerlovin punk," he said to himself, "I got a good mind to ..." He suppressed the thought, fearing that, as worked up as he was, he might turn the truck around, fly back to the store, and kick the living hell out the boy. Myron would never help him lynch Tossie Green. Never in ten million years. He scrutinized the young man's scrawny frame in his mind's eye. "What kind a so-called men are they makin' these days? Hell God damnation, you'd think these boys would look forward to a good ol nigger hangin with good ol fried chicken, lemonade and beer cold enough to crack your teeth, and enough potato salad to choke a horse on. Boy, that's a git together."

Treadwell watched the road with his gray, unblinking eyes. He smiled as he imagined how Tossie Green would writhe on that rope as fat flames chewed at the soles of his feet. He would struggle like a channel cat on twenty-pound test line. Blisters would swell, pop open and spew hot grease. The nigger would leap, holler, and die. "Boy, that's a git together."

His wife, LouEllen, who had been quietly sitting for the entire ride, turned toward her husband, and cleared her throat as if preparing to sing a hymn. This, he knew, meant that she was preparing to lecture him on his lack of attention toward some trifling domestic chore, or his frequent backsiding from church. He squeezed the wheel and clenched his jaw in anticipation of LouEllen's mindless twaddle. "I don't suppose," LouEllen began, "that you've noticed that Maggie's having

this child after only seven months carrying it." Treadwell kept his eyes on the road and said nothing. He felt LouEllen's stare sear the right side of his neck. "Can't say I have," he said after awhile. Then he said to himself, "Lord have mercy, woman, git it over with." The long silences always made him wish LouEllen would disappear. "Wish you would go off to wherever your voice went off to," he often said to himself. "Or take your fat ass back to that niggerlovin bastard you divorced yourself from."

"I didn't think you would," said LouEllen. "You never give half a mind to the condition of that poor girl. Just work her to death. Poor thing. It's a miracle that poor child never miscarried."

"Well I didn't have no idea she was even like that when I hit er."

"Like what?"

"You know what I mean."

"Pregnant?"

"Now, LouEllen, for cryin out loud—"

"I'm not a bit surprised you didn't have *any* idea what Maggie's condition was. Why you don't even look at the poor thing."

Treadwell grinned inwardly. "No," he said, "but I watch er."

He turned toward his wife. The truck swerved. "Are you trying to kill us, Mr. Treadwell?" said LouEllen. "What do you mean you watch her?"

"I mean what I mean."

"Theodore Treadwell, how many times do I have to tell you that that girl does not steal. She's one of the most honest colored in the State of Alabama. In the world maybe. And to tell you the truth, I'm surprised she doesn't steal with what you pay her. You just remember that the next time you go to raising your hand . . ." Treadwell gave a vicious tug to the wheel and slammed on the brakes.

"She's a nigger woman, LouEllen," he hissed, "a nigger woman—and she should a never called me an old fool. Maybe I'm gettin old, but I ain't *no* nigger's fool. In my day . . ." He paused as if searching for the right words. The smell of the old truck, hot oil and gas, rose to his nostrils. Neither he nor his wife moved or spoke for what seemed to be too long a time. He wished that neither he nor his wife nor the world would ever move again. That time would not move beyond 6:53, December 13, 1965. Just stop. Here—right now. That the old truck and his old bones would be covered by dust and pebble and rock. Cover it all up. Bury it. For it made no sense. Maggie had never complained before. Never a peep out those pecan smooth, pecan brown lips. And he had certainly done worse, it seemed to him. Why now? Why all this excitement over a knuckle or two upside the head? Hadn't he done much worse?

LouEllen's voice eased into his consciousness like a telephone ring jangling from a closed room. "It was Clara called you an old fool, Treadwell. How many times do I have to tell—"

"Why you defendin that nigger? I heard what I heard."

Continued on page 8

REBIRTH

Continued from page 7

"Well then you heard wrong. It was your own daughter called you an old fool, Teddy... and the thing that mystifies your daughter and me is—"

"Stepdaughter. Clara's my stepdaughter."

"—is that it was Tuesday when you and Clara had that argument, and Wednesday when you hit Maggie. You just popped out of your chair and liked to knock that child across the kitchen."

"She—"

"I was there, Treadwell, so don't even try to contradict me. Maggie didn't say one mumbling word. I swear, it's like you were just itching for any old reason to hit the girl. The only thing is, you didn't have one. Not a one. What in the Lord's name's wrong with you? And please get this truck to home. We haven't got all day."

But Treadwell merely sat there, gripping the wheel, glaring down the road. His head tightened. He swallowed hard and opened his mouth to speak, but his bottom lip trembled so, he feared his words would sound more peevish than manly. LouEllen tapped his arm. "Sitting *here* won't get us *there*, Treadwell." She sat back, folding her arms, then said, "Don't you forget what her Tossie said to you today. My Grace. My Grace. That boy came out to the house looking to shake your brains loose.

"You—you had better thank your lucky stars you went to work early. Why, if it hadn't been for Clara and me to calm him down he'd have gone out to the store looking for your blood instead of just the tongue-lashing he gave you. And Maggie! Maggie, the girl you knocked down with the back of your hand, begged Tossie not to do anything. The child's black as the devil, but she's near a saint." Her voice raised a notch or two. "Oh yes, Mr. Treadwell, you had better thank your lucky stars." Treadwell started the engine and eased the ancient truck back onto the pavement. "And you, woman," he thought, "better thank your goddamn stars I'm driving... or I'd be wringin' your fat neck."

They arrived home as the sky was congealing into a sharp, cobalt blue. The magnolia blossoms that lined the driveway made the air smell citrusy. As Treadwell shut off the engine, the sound of bleating crickets soothed his ears. They stepped through the front door of the house. Treadwell sniffed the warm odor of home and was disappointed to find that supper had not yet been started.

They moved toward the open door of the bedroom. Maggie, lying under a cotton sheet, perspired profusely. Clara leaned over her, applying cool cloths to Maggie's face. The time drew near. Maggie's breathing was irregular and coarse, as she moaned under the blossoming pressure.

"How is she, Clara?" said LouEllen, wringing her hands. She moved closer to the bed. "Just fine, Mama, but it looks to me she's dilated full and Doctor David ain't come yet. He ain't even returned your call. I don't think he's gonna make it in time."

Treadwell hovered in the doorway for a moment, then stepped toward the bed. "Well," he said, "why didn't ya'll just run her over to the dadburn hospital—" LouEllen spun round

and pushed him out the room. "Get on out of here, now. It was too late for the hospital when I came out to get you. Water's broke, contractions aren't but a couple of minutes apart—Good Lord, I haven't got time to explain everything to you. This is no place for a man. Get."

"Well, what in damnation you yank me out here for if this ain't—"

"You're here to keep Tossie company in the kitchen. The poor boy's as nervous as a pup in a hailstorm. He needs someone to talk to—"

"Why didn't you get one a his nigger friends to come over here?"

"Go on. Clara and I have work to do."

"Well, why?"

"Cause none of them ever hit his gal, and none of them owes him an apology... And I just can't see you sitting up in that store making money for yourself after what you did to his gal."

"What! What did she say? What do you mean?"

"Tossie's waiting, Mr. Treadwell."

"Stuff Tossie. I ain't never apologized to no nigger in my life. Whud that girl—"

"The kitchen, Theodore." LouEllen shut the door in his face. He backed away from the door. He went first to the bathroom, passed at trickle of water, smoothed his silver crew cut with his palm. He went back to the bedroom door and listened to the low moaning of the black woman and the cooing of his wife and stepdaughter. He turned from the door and headed for the kitchen. "Damn woman," he mumbled. "God-damn woman."

Big Tossie Green gave Treadwell a hard, moonlight stare as the old man timidly slid into the kitchen.

"Well, hello, Tossie."

"Mr. Treadwell."

They offered one another limp hands, shook, neither man looking into the other's eyes. Treadwell imagined a fat rope around Tossie's neck. "Coffee, Tossie?" he said.

"No, thank you."

A mosquito lit on Tossie's arm. He let it stay there.

"Uh, well now, how's the mechanic business comin along, boy?" said Treadwell.

Tossie's neck muscles drew taut. "Just fine," he said.

"Good. Good."

Treadwell smiled too broadly. He felt foolish, and pulled his face into an impassive frown. "Say, uh, Tossie. I hope there's no hard feelins tween you and me after this mornin. I mean, well, I give what I done a lot of thought. A whole lot. An well, you know how it is. Hell. A ol coot like me, well, he don't take to new things so quick. Just can't seem to break these ol timey habits a mine. See what I'm saying, Toss?"

Tossie slowly rubbed the arm the mosquito had bitten. "Um-hm," he said after a while, "I see what you sayin."

Treadwell watched Tossie's face for a moment, nodded and continued.

"Sometimes, Tossie, sometimes, you see... a ol son-of-a-bitch like me, well, he just gits used to things bein a pa'ticuler way. Things just seem to run a whole lot smoother when they

IF BEALE STREET COULD TALK

for Stanley Booth,
who set it straight.

some say that Thomas Edison was born black, on Beale Street, and exposure to too much electricity turned him hell-fire white.

truth is he lived on Main Street and wired his boarding house room to kill roaches. this was the same town that gave us Booker White, Piano Red, and Big Mama Blues.

that was before 1917, when Eli Persons was accused of raping a sixteen year old white girl and was turned over by the Memphis police to a mob that thought hanging was too good for him.

they roasted Eli on a huge log, and after his body cooled, they cut out his heart, then they rolled his head down the center of Beale Street.

so baby doll, Memphis isn't all music and moonshine. there are words filled with so much anger, they won't fit out of my mouth.

next time someone says he wishes Beale Street could talk,
remember.

Franz Douskey
Mt. Carmel, CT

run...well, when they run the ay we're all used to. You followin me, Toss?"

Tossie made no reply.

"Now," said Treadwell. "Now you take that ol truck I got out yonder."

He thumbed back toward the front door.

"Now, I've had that bucket a bolts for goin on twenty-one years, an let me tell you, Tossie, can't nobody make her run like I can. Why, I keep her tuned and oiled an all. I treat her real good, son. Real good."

"Hell, Tossie, I know that ol machine out there better'n the mechanics and engineers what threw er together. I know er, see. An when she gits a little too temper'mental and won't do right no matter how I pets an pampers her, well then, see, I git me a good-size pipe wrench and give it to er good. Why, I just

whang the living daylights out er till she straightens up. An I tell you it ain't failed me yet."

He snatched at a mosquito that had been flying around his head. He thought he had caught it and squeezed long and hard till his knuckles turned white as teeth. He opened his hand and found it empty. He then looked at Tossie who kept his stern gaze on the red checkered table cloth. "But I'm the onliest one can do that, Tossie, cause I been tendin to that ol six-banger for twenty-one years. Can't nobody git good mileage out er like I can. An don't you think for a minute I'd do anything to hurt her. You know what I mean. No real damage. No siree, son. I got just the right touch.

"So you see, Tossie? I mean, you understand, don't you? I mean, mechanickin up in these parts as long as you have an' all. Some things work so good for some folks cause they got em a system slicker'n owl shit. Then the gover'ment or some fellers in fancy suits who don't know nothin about our lives out here comes along an says, Say, fellers, you can't do that no more accordin to code three-of-such-an-such. Hell goddamnation, Tossie, a feller can't make heads or tails out a things no more." He felt himself become a little queasy. "I—I'm sorry, Tossie. Things ain't the way I thought they was supposed to be, son. I'm clean sorry for whuppin your gal."

Silence. And then Tossie lifted a sinewy hand from the table and uncurled one finger and held it just inches from Treadwell's nose. "Let's just hope, Mr. Treadwell... Let's just you and me hope an pray my woman or my child don't die, or your own family gonna go through some changes too. Cause I'm here to tell you right now. I don't give a good goddamn what the law do to me. I'll break your sorry ass in two just as sure as I'm sittin here."

Tossie lowered his hand. "Just as sure as I'm sittin here. Just like I told you this afternoon."

Silence resumed and hung about them for several long moments. The two men sat together in the sticky heat, moving only to fend off mosquitoes. A bitter bile collected in Treadwell's throat. A thin coat of perspiration bled from his forehead. His mouth felt dry. Never—never in all his sixty-nine years had he ever stooped to a black man. His queasiness grew as he considered the sorrowful state the world had fallen into.

He thought about how utterly frightened he had been this afternoon when Tossie's enormous shadow spilled through the door of Treadwell's General Store. He had lost any will to speak or even to shudder as Tossie hollered, pounded the counter, made astounding threats. It was only when Tossie left that he found his tongue. "Niggers...niggers," he croaked while reaching for the oily, blue handkerchief in his back pocket. "I hate them goddamn bastards, Myron." He wiped Tossie's still-warm spittle and his own perspiration from his face. He stared at the doorway through which Tossie had just walked, as if he could summon him back with his steel gray eyes. "I hate em, Myron. You hear me, boy?"

"Sure do, Mr. Treadwell."

"Who in hell-fire do they think they are all of a goddamn sudden? Did you hear what that nigger said to me? Did you

Continued on page 10

REBIRTH

Continued from page 9

hear what that . . . never. No nigger never storms in here like a regular man pointin no two-tone finger in my face. Never!"

"Well now, Mr. Treadwell, times have changed, ain't they?"

"Times are supposed to change. Coons ain't. That big black buck stormin in here like a white man an' demandin I don't hit his bitch. You ever see anything like that, boy?"

"Well, it was almighty uppity for a nigger, I got to admit, but . . ."

"But what?" Treadwell began pacing the dusty hardwood floor. Flies buzzed in the hot air and he swung at them. He turned in time to see Myron's face contort in an ugly yawn. "But what, boy?"

"Mr. Treadwell, that gal a Tossie's is . . . well, she's expectin."

"That is beside the point, boy. Who's workin for who?"

"Oh, sir, I'm workin for you, but—"

"I'm talkin about Maggie, stupid. *She* works for *me*, right?"

"Been your housekeeper for damn near eight years, Mr. Treadwell."

"Well then, I got the right to knock the hell out er ever now an then, don't I?" He paced as if caged. Sweat trickled down his rippled brow, he wiped it angrily into his crew cut. A fly landed on his hand. He cussed and swung. "Don't I?"

"Well, sir," said Myron, yawning again, "you never hit on me none." A cool breeze wafted in and Myron closed his eyes, leaned back in his chair. The breeze died off in midsentence and the air in the tiny store became instantly hot again.

"I never hit on you, son, cause you're a full-grown white man. Maggie Green, you might a noticed, ain't that. She's only got two things she's good for. Housekeepin's one . . ." A lewd grin turned his lips. "An' if you don't know the second one . . . why, you ain't as full-grown as I thought you was."

Myron opened his eyes, folded his arms, grinned, arched an eyebrow. "You know," he said, "If I didn't know better, Mr. Treadwell, I'd suspect you done porked Maggie Green a time or two."

"More'n two, boy."

"Aw now, Mr. Treadwell . . ."

"I swear."

Myron pressed his lips together and cocked his head just a bit. "Well," he said, "if you don't mind me sayin so, sir—"

"What's your point, boy?"

"Well, it just don't seem—I mean it just sound like—"

"Sheeit. If you don't believe me, just ask Andy Fitts over to the post office. He'll set your dumb ass straight. Him and me and Orvy Still popped that bitch last . . . well I can't . . . must a been a couple of months back, anyway. Had her all night long, boy. Bitch couldn't walk right for a week, I reckon. Yeah, we got us some Wild Turkey and one a them—"

"Mr. Treadwell."

"What!"

"Mr. Fitts been dead four, five years now."

"You callin me a liar?"

"No sir, I ain't. It's just—"

"Well shut the fuck up then." Treadwell felt his lip trembling, fought against it. He stared hard at Myron, but the young

man had apparently lost interest in their conversation. Myron stared at the countertop, dozy-eyed. He then looked under the counter, sat up, leaned forward, and began rooting through its shelves. He grabbed an old copy of *Sports Illustrated* and idly thumbed through it.

Treadwell felt his mouth move, felt words grumbling at the base of his throat. He really had no idea what he was going to say. He just felt the words boil up from his throat. His jaws felt stiff, as if he hadn't spoken for a decade, and then very slowly his words began to tumble from his mouth. "There's too goddamn many of em," he heard himself say. "There's too many niggers in this world, Myron. Them people breed faster'n jackrabbits. Ever damn place where you go there's niggers. In the front of buses. In restaurants. The goddamn federal governments lettin em run all over the damn place. Hell, you can't even sit in a goddamn theater without thinkin that—that you could be sittin in a chair some coon warmed up for you durin the matinee. And what about them water fountains? Where's a body supposed to wet his whistle since they took down them signs downtown? . . . Well, I'm talkin to you, boy. Where the hell you supposed to go?"

He stood with his eyes bugging, his hand thrust forward. Myron sat and fanned himself with the magazine, a wing of red hair on top of his head, flapping up and down. Myron shifted in his chair and cleared his throat. "Don't nobody like none a this, but I, for one, ain't gonna thirst to death—"

"Well I sure would. I surely—"

"I mean, just so long as they don't try to mess with our women."

Treadwell threw his arms in the air as if signaling a touchdown, and then waved them. "There's the ticket, boy. Now you're sayin somethin. That's the next step, Myron. There it is. I'm telling you right now, that if you give a shit about your unborn daughter growin up in a world full a integratey, evil thinkin, black bucks . . ."

"Mr. Treadwell—"

" . . . help me string up Tossie Green an cut off his balls."

Treadwell dropped his arms. He leered at Myron, his tobacco-stained teeth glistening. Myron's eyes were big. "Help you?" said the young man.

"Tonight, boy. We can do it tonight, before his bitch gets home from my house."

"Lynch Tossie Green?"

"I didn't stutter, boy. Will you or won't you?"

"Tonight?"

"Yes. Tonight! Tonight! You a practicin retard, boy?"

At that moment the two men were startled by the growl of an old truck. The sound shook the windows of the store. LouEllen sped into the store, red-faced and winded. "Treadwell. Theodore. You've got to come home."

No one would help him. No one understood.

Today, Myron had treated him as one would treat a madman. The way the boy cringed when he had spoken made him feel wild and helpless. "Where," he asked himself, "have all the men gone? What in God's name happend to all them fellers like Luke Parris and Erwin Cross. Now there was two white men could scare the black off tires just by clearin their throat."

He sifted his mind again and again to conjure up the name of just one man who could help him turn the world right side up. He sifted and sifted till his head tightened, throbbed, burned. Just one. But none came. Only sepia images of the past tumbled through his mind. Images of black eyes that turned away from the sight of LouEllen's slender ankles, and the black lips shaping the word "sir," the day Uncle Pres pounded eight knuckles into the black face that would not yield enough sidewalk, the sable flesh he thrust himself into like day piercing night, the coiling, bouncing flames... Just one word, just one name, please, just one sign. *Goddamit, Andy Fitts ain't dead. How could he be dead? Why, it was just a couple a months ago him and me and... who else was it was with us that night? All that Wild Turkey. Now who was it that night? Seems it was that redhead boy—*

Then his reverie was broken by the mewling of an infant. The two men leaped from their chairs and clambered into the living room. Tossie danced around the room in jubilation. "I'm a daddy!" he shouted. "Lord hell mercy, a daddy!" Treadwell slapped him on the shoulder and guffawed, "Let's go take a look at your youngun, Toss." He was relieved the child had not been stillborn, but was anxious to know of Maggie's condition. His legs felt like water. His head pounded. He thought he would vomit.

The men stumbled into the bedroom to find Maggie asleep, LouEllen spongeing the newborn, and Clara tending to the afterbirth. Tossie stood frozen, staring at the baby. "It's a boy, Mr. Green," said Clara. "Ain't he just precious?" said LouEllen, as she swaddled the baby. "Well, don't be afraid of the child, Tossie, he doesn't even have teeth yet. Go on, son, hold your baby boy."

Tossie reached down, lifted the baby up into his great hands. He could have held him in the middle of his palm. "He sho is a pretty thing, Maggie. God Lord what a pretty child."

"Pretty's for girls, Tossie," said LouEllen. "That boy is handsome."

"I swear," said Treadwell. "Uh, looky here, Tossie, can I... why don't you let me hold him for a sec."

Tossie looked at LouEllen. She glanced at her husband, smiled at Tossie, and nodded. "You just see you careful wid im," said Tossie.

"I will, Tossie. I'll be easy." Treadwell received the child into his arms, and Tossie knelt next to Maggie and stroked her brow. "Just what the world needs," thought Treadwell, "another goddamn pickaninny." He held the baby close to his chest and made cooing noises at him. He tried to smile, but this only made his head hurt more. He couldn't keep himself from trembling. A hot pressure surged through his chest, and his thoughts hissed at him, in a whirl of static, that if he were a man, he would dash the infant to the floor and kick it across the room. But almost as if Tossie sensed his thought, he rose, huge

and heavy like a gathering storm, and stood close to Treadwell. "Howdy doo, youngun," said Treadwell, a little too loudly. The infant started and opened his eyes for an instant. The eyes seemed to shine a soft steel gray. "I'll be goddamned," Treadwell said. He hadn't intended to say it out loud. "What is it, Teddy?" demanded LouEllen, moving to her husband's side. Tossie stepped forward, making to seize the child. "What's wrong?" he said.

Treadwell stepped back from him. "Nothing's wrong, Toss. Just gimme a minute to hold him. I mean a ol... ol coot like me, well, it ain't ever day he gits to hold a darlin little boy like this here. Toss, you got the rest of your life with him. I just... I just want..." His voice dimmed to a whisper. "To look him over."

The room vibrated with a strange silence as Treadwell rocked the infant in his arms. "Howdy doo," he said. "Howdy doo," hoping the child would again open its eyes. Tossie, Clara, and LouEllen stood astonished as Treadwell rocked, cooed, smiled. He held the baby close to his chest, rocked him and rocked him. "Howdy doo, boy." He looked up from the baby into the unbelieving eyes of Tossie, moved toward him, placed the baby in Tossie's big arms and left the room.

As he lay in bed, this night, Theodore Treadwell felt reborn. He was happier than he had been in years. He was sure, sure as there would be a tomorrow, that there were other men in the world who saw things as he did. He wished for all his brothers, this night, just two things. First that they would rekindle the fires

of the white race and rise up to tear the black world apart—cause black men were good for nothin. And black women were good for only two—no three, three things. Second. He wished that his brothers should someday know the sweet and unforgettable joy of holding their first born sons gently in their arms.

He hugged his pillow close to him drifted into sleep, and dreamed of the fiery death of Tossie Green.

Reginald McKnight currently teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh. His story, "Rebirth," is from a collection titled *Moustapha's Eclipse*, which placed first among 320 manuscripts to win the prestigious Drue Heinz Literature Prize.

McKnight taught English and Black Literature at the Arapahoe Community College and the University of Denver. In 1981, he received the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship to study the folklore and contemporary literature of West Africa, and he spent a year teaching and writing in Senegal. In 1988, he was a fellow at the Breadloaf Writer's Conference.



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The Rear Of A Bus Named DESIRE

By Brenda Dyer Quant

The Desire bus was always crowded with faces when I got on at Mazant and North Dourgenois en route to school. Most of the Black faces were already on the bus, having boarded along Desire Street. They sat and stood in the rear. The white faces sitting and standing in the front half of the bus were a daily obstacle. I had to squeeze through them, denying that any interracial touching was happening, to take my stand in the rear. We could all do this mental trick, us coloreds and whites who rode the buses during segregation. We could touch each other, fall into each other on the pitching bus, out of the legal necessity to get to our assigned turf, and once there, deny everything.

Black and white passengers on New Orleans city buses were separated by something called the "screen." This was a piece of wood about 3/4-inch thick, a foot or so long and about 4 inches wide. On one side, the word COLORED was printed in black lettering; on the other side the word WHITE appeared. The piece of wood had two metal pegs drilled into its bottom edge. These allowed it to be placed upright on the seatback rail, a metal tube with two holes to accommodate the two metal pegs.

Thusly, the schizophrenic COLORED/WHITE sign stood on its narrow edge and became a screen. It could be moved and placed on any seatback. As long as Blacks sat behind it and whites in front, the law was satisfied. If you were Black, and there were empty seats behind you, you were expected to move farther back, and to take the screen with you, filling all empty seats behind the screen and leaving any remaining empty seats in front of it. If you were white, and the closest empty seat to the front of the bus was behind the screen, you simply moved the screen back and took your seat in front of it. If all seats were occupied, Blacks were not expected to give up their seats to a white person getting on. In this way, New Orleans was different from Montgomery and other Southern cities.

City buses were integrated on May 31, 1958 at 12:01 a.m. It was accomplished by decree, the city fathas and muthas wishing to avoid another Montgomery. The screens vanished. Now we could sit anywhere, even the long sideways seats in the very front of the bus just behind the driver. The screen had never reached the extreme front of the bus. The two long seats had always been off limits. So it became a common sight to see a nearly empty bus with 10 Black people bunched together on the two long seats in front. We were testing out an experience we'd been denied—riding sideways.

Actually, riding in front was more than a mere novelty. Most

white bus riders were slow to accept Negroes sitting all over the place. They held on to their old ways by refusing to sit behind us, choosing to stand, even if it meant standing behind us, rather than lower themselves into a seat behind where the screen would have been. If they were already sitting and a Negro sat in front of them, and there were no available seats in front of the offending Negro, they stood. And of course, if a Negro sat next to a white person, the white person almost invariably shot up out of his/her seat as if propelled.

Guess what devilment this led to. If a few Blacks sat in the long seats in the very front, it meant that the entire bus was behind the non-existent screen, and off limits to whites. We took advantage of this and clustered up front at every opportunity. We also took up as many seats as we could, sitting all over the bus in singles rather than in pairs. Even best friends would split up and sit in different seats. The unspoken strategy was to make them choose between sitting behind us, or sitting next to us, or standing all the way to Canal Street. For months they chose the vertical option.

**IT'S
THAT
TIME
OF
YEAR
AGAIN**

*the frost is on the pumpkin
like the peach fuzz on a
young boy's chin*

*the leaves lie in heaps
in the gutter like
crippled derelicts*

& the moon

*the moon sticks out like
a triumphant cue ball*

*gloating with white
supremacy*

*after having bumped off
the rest of the world.*

**Ronald Edward Kittell
Auburn, WA**

It was us against them. And we had power over them. We loved it. We ate it up. The shoe was on the other foot now. And what a big, black, angry, resentful foot it was. Rosa Parks made her heroic stand by refusing to stand. The sight of sitting Blacks and standing whites looked like justice to us.

After some time passed, they began to rationalize that sitting behind us was tolerable, but sitting next to us—never! That was still months off for the majority of them.

There was a white girl who rode the Desire bus some mornings. She got on before me and usually sat on the long seat behind the driver. She always wore makeup, a little too much of it. Her hair was mouse colored and always looked pinched and starched. She wore prim-looking skirts and blouses. She was nondescript and would have been nearly invisible were it not for her deformity—a severely hunched back that doubled her over. She was a walking right angle. She strained to appear natural carrying this heavy burden on her back and trying to look up.

The girl was just a little older than me, and I couldn't help wondering about her life—her likes and dislikes and limitations. Could she dance? Would she ever have a boyfriend? Did she have a job?

Everyone stared at her. It showed on her face that she would never become accustomed to the stares. I admired her for venturing out into the world, riding the bus to wherever it was she was headed, the starers be damned. I heaped pity on this girl for years from my side of the screen, and concentrated on not staring at her. I wished her well.

One morning, during the public-transit reconstruction period, I boarded the bus and sat on the long seat in front. I was still a front-seat junkie then. The girl was sitting on the other end of the same seat. As soon as my behind touched the seat, hers was up. She moved with speed I did not think she was capable of, grabbing the vertical bar and swinging her bent over body to the other side of the bus, to the other long seat, where a white person was sitting. She landed there wrecklessly. Her face was flushed with indignation. The other white people glared at me. I had endangered this poor girl's fragile life. Made her get up so fast she could have fallen over. Why prey on the weakest person on the bus? their eyes asked. Have you no shame?



NEXT ISSUE

Autumn, 1989

A Salute to Black Women Writers

I had no shame. I stared at the girl until I got off the bus. I gloated over her hump and my lack of one. I thought how like a ridiculous animal she looked, swinging herself across the bus in that comic posture. Most of all, I cursed myself for having wasted years of pity on this unworthy creature.

I remember these thoughts clearly because it was frightening to me that I could have such thoughts. But I was powerless to stop the thoughts and the staring. I'd been sitting down next to white people on the bus for months, expecting them to leap up. Usually they did. It had become a quest—seeing how many of them I could propel per week. But I didn't have this silent bond of sympathy and understanding with any of these white strangers, except this girl. I had not expected her to be among the leaping whites. Had I equated disability with sensitivity? Difference with tolerance?

I suppose so, but it was more than that. During all those years that I lavished pity on the girl, I had built up a sense of superiority. I thought that despite segregation and unequal opportunity, I had a better life than she did. I could stand up straight. I could dance. I was going to have a boyfriend some day. I thought that white-skin privilege was wasted on her. That if she had the choice between being born with a bent white body or a straight black one, she would have chosen to be Black. And so from my position of straight-backed superiority, I showed the girl some kindness, if only in my head. But the moment she sprang up and spun away from me, I knew I was wrong about her. I knew that when she looked at me, she must have thought, "I may be bent up, but at least I'm not a nigger and I don't have to sit next to one."

Segregation brings out the ugliest of emotions on both sides of the screen.



BUTTERFLY

*We were always the butterfly
but
They only showed us the caterpillar—
undeveloped,
unchanged,
luckless.
Then the TRUTH exploded!*

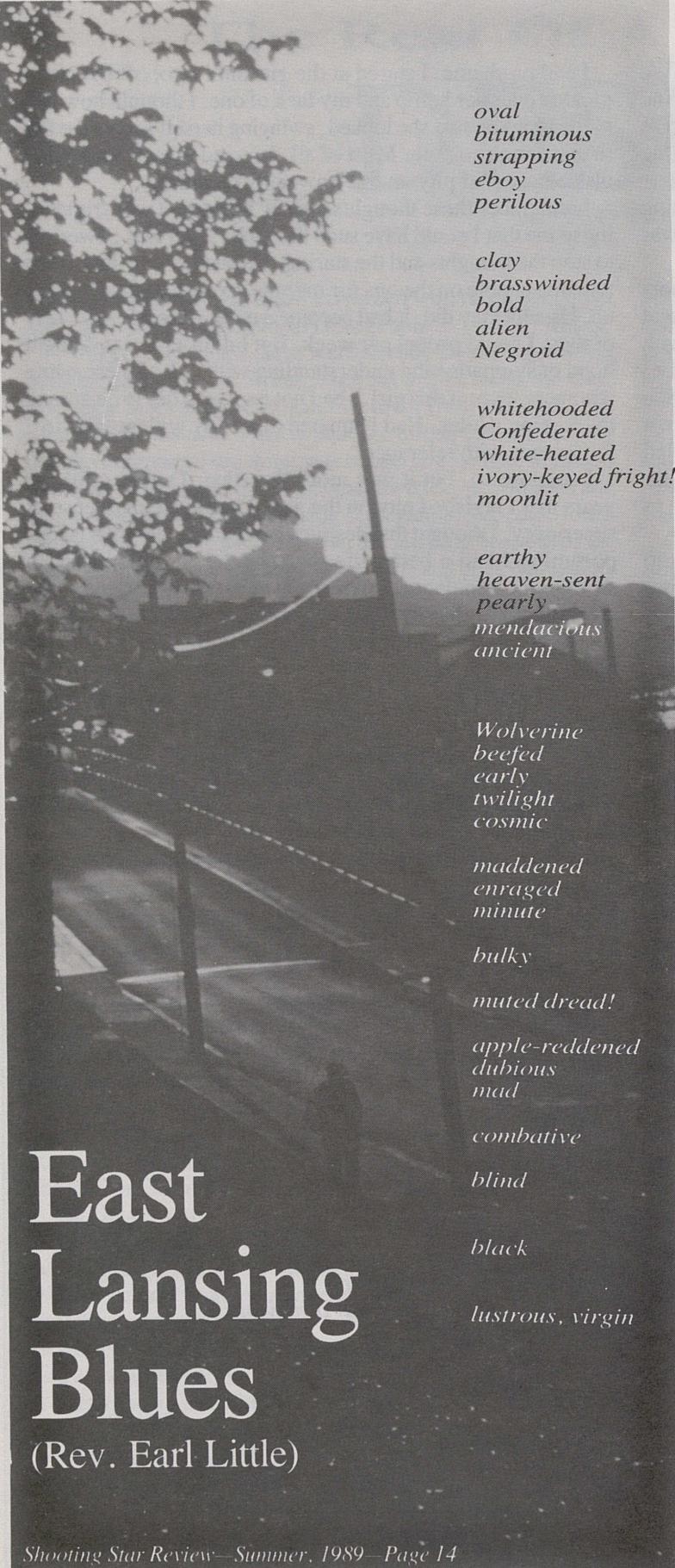
*And we picked up the slivers of our
existence
and made our own mirrors
and saw the miracle of our own wings
for the FIRST time.*

And THEN, we took flight.

*Gloria Starling
Chicago, IL*

East Lansing Blues

(Rev. Earl Little)



oval
bituminous
strapping
eboy
perilous

clay
brasswinded
bold
alien
Negroid

whitehooded
Confederate
white-heated
ivory-keyed fright!
moonlit

earthy
heaven-sent
pearly
mendacious
ancient

Wolverine
beefed
early
twilight
cosmic

maddened
enraged
minute

bulky

muted dread!

apple-reddened
dubious
mad

combative

blind

black

lustrous, virgin

his complexion was like the coal that burned fiercely in a stokehole. his body like an oak tree planted on a road. for the promising seeds of Garveyism were fertiley planted in his plowed, soul. His voice was one of numerous, sparkling cornets sounding the alarm and beckoning the sheep back to the West African Promised Land. Puncturally the rebels arose like a Northern mummy in the night. He and his family were swollen with Every window pane was dishonored. Earl was still solidly determined to be an man instead of a mouse! the Black Legion with tongue coarsely coated with an hate and hissing like a rattlesnake, bit at Earl's manhood and dignity and venomously promised an wake. One evening clouded by insurmountable stars, he and his spouse tossed bolts of lightning and thunder at each other with their minds and tongues. He bolted away consumed by madness before the dusk could come Next time his remains rested before the family's eyes, there arose a Earl's skull was crushed as he lay dead. Legends declare that the disciples of Northern evil, under the cloak of a moon's light, placed the final, subdued sector of his body across some street-car track and then was sliced in half by trolley: that the Triple-K or Black Legion band marred silencing this star which had phosphorescently burned with the Garvey sunlight for a sky. Legends don't always lie.

McArthur Gunter
Danville, VA



ULURU

600 million year Uluru
Red cracked half
of a fallen moon.
Desert oak wind
worried, and old.
600 million years out
of the dreamtime
and still sleeping.
600 million years
Uluru, then flip over
into a half scorched
turtle, and die.
Whilst a thousand
panting tourists
erode your surface
with mineral water.

© C.E. Hull 1988
New South Wales, Australia

DEAD LAND RED

they are on the beach
with their ancestors
and spears.
they are on the beach
in this bicentennial year
telling Cook—to take his
gifts, and go.
I am on the beach
at Botany Bay—that
same day,
when the land died.
I smell its great drying end
from far inland—
I don't go near it.
It has changed its face.
Dead land red—lost
its soul, without a whisper
of protest.
I listen—but the Koories are still.
we are on the beach
without a land.
I listen—to a giant red corpse
—too still
to stir in its grave.

© C.E. Hull 1988
New South Wales, Australia

Listen to the wind blow

by
Woodie King, Jr.



Illustration By Yvette Gant

The South that Shug remembers is one of morning-dew-covered greenfields, hooky-day fishing on the Tombigbee River, and dollar cricket catching. But that was the South of a happy seven year old wagon-box rider. It was a long time ago when Shug was seven, riding wagons and catching crickets.

Shug is riding South now passing dew-covered greenfields.

He is approaching the death of a father; he was left something almost the same as a slow dying; a daily struggle for survival. And Shug, the rider, knows that the father that he must see dying has been dead for a lifetime. He died when he sent Shug North to ghetto-land at seven to fight a losing battle for survival.

Shug passes through green tree hamlets filled with greenfields and moss-filled shady lanes, departing and approaching slow death. Far away, he sees tree top landscaping. And all the moss-filled trees on shady river banks look exactly as he remembers moss-filled trees twenty-one years ago along the Tombigbee River.

Looking through the dark glass at the telephone poles, Shug thinks of Detroit...the winters...the winds...basement...a mother dying, leaving him all alone...alone...

It was lonely in ghetto-land then...December, bleak, but no dying embers warmed Shug's

fifteen-year-old body. Each gust of cold wind found its way into the dark hallway where he tried to sleep. And with each gust of wind, Shug mumbled curses back at the dawn. Cursing did not stop the wind. It had so many entrances; it had a young boy homeless, ragged. That wind had Shug captured, jailed; he could not blow his nose as he wanted because he was afraid he might wake the day-night sleepers within the house; had him so that he could sleep only until the December dawn entered into daybreak. The December wind bit and pricked Shug's black body, taking advantage of its opportunities.

Cold, frightened, ragged, praying for a father, a remembered South, without money, not able to find it, work for it, Shug was lost in North ghetto-land.

Could there be any warm and pretty places for him to spend his tomorrows? Or would he forever dream of other hallways in other tomorrows?

Shug sat up, rubbed his body and gym-shoe covered feet, trying to get circulation in frozen blackness. Listened...to the wind blow. Wanted to blow his nose; could not; felt the cold mucus running down and over his mouth. Wanted to sneeze. Wanted...Wanted to remember what it was like to eat a warm breakfast. Wanted to remember the taste of grits

and eggs...cooked food. Could not! Shug was in ghetto-land and not a remembered dew-covered Southland.

"Ma, cold, help me." His mother could not hear him; her struggle was over.

"Ma," he said, "take my cricket money." He wiped his nose, the tears from his eyes. "Man, what you talking about crickets for?"

A rat, grey-green, wet and cold entered with the next gust of wind, looked at Shug shaking, went up the stairs, scratched at the door, silence.

Who entering from that outside world of white and light could help Shug?

He rested his head against the wall of the hall, teeth chattered, rattled. It was so cold, so dark in that hallway. It's always so cold and dark, Shug was thinking.

It was cold and dark that morning when the city ambulance took his mother away. That morning the wind and the ice became one. And ghetto-land rested cold, silent, as if deciding whether to eat its people for warmth. And Shug must be eaten by it or he must destroy it. Knowing this, watching them take her away, Shug hoped that outside world would come. Although violence was around him, he had never destroyed nature beyond the cricket.

Not able to scream in rage, Shug could only pray frozen prayers to nature. That morning

the wind and the snow, as one, whirled and twisted, loding itself here and there in the transparent dwellings before entering Shug and his mother's basement bottom. Dark it was way down there. He moved around, fumbling in darkness, giving his mother the drug-store medicine; the broth he vaguely remembered her making when he was sick with cold. Hearing her cough that faint cough she had suffered with for so long. Shug wondered when the other world of white and light omnipotence would come. Dark it was down there in that basement when his mother stopped coughing; and so very dark it was when he watched them take her away from his young life.

That outside world of white and light did not come.

Looking out of the glass door into dawn, he saw the snow falling; so white and beautiful that he wanted to enter it. Looked again at his gym shoes, again out the glass door. Heard his empty stomach growl.

Listened . . . to the wind blow.

"Damn! Man, you need something to eat!"

Picked up his cardboard box with the odds. Planned to take them to the junkyard. Could use the box later, after he sold the two pieces of iron, to make a fire. Could warm his hands and feet. Shug cautiously went out into the pretty white snow.

Where you go, man? Where you get something to eat?

Shug moved a little faster (had read in a comic book how this guy lost in the cold forest kept warm by running) through the alleys of that land, searching through garbage cans for a morning breakfast. Somewhere Shug found a biscuit, somewhere he found an end piece of Wonder Bread. Sat in the snow eating the frozen food.

Why you here, man?

Had been to the welfare—"Have your Mother come in." A.D.C.—"Father's name?" The people—"Mister, loan me fifty cent?" Had been . . .

What bright places could Shug go tomorrow that were dark yesterdays?

. . . school.

"Look at Shug's old clothes."

"Look at his shoes."

He ate the piece of hard Wonder Bread; saved the biscuit. Started running again to the junkyard. Running . . . running to sell his iron . . . running home from school in Alabama at the age of seven, passing dew-covered greenfields, going down moss-filled shady lanes; moments . . . moments of wagonbox happiness.

Why you 'membering yesterdays?

—Aunt Lily, I'm home. I'm home home home . . .

—Take off them clean clothes, boy—look at you sweatin' like somebody's horse—where you been; what took you so long? Lawd have mercy—look



Photo by Eric Jones

at . . . just look at you! My sugar! It all sweaty. Lawd! Give Aunt Lily a big hug and kiss and set down and eat your dinner.

—Tomorrow Saturday? Huh?

—Yes; stop talking so much. Dinner getting cold. Talk all the time—just like your daddy.

—Me and Bogie gone catch crickets tomorrow morning! Hot dog! Hot dog!

—Cricket time already? Lawd, time sure fly.

—Hot dog! Mr. J.W. gone buy all me and Bogie can catch! All we can catch!!

—Eat your dinner.

—Going over by the sawmill, then over by the Tombigbee. Plenty crickets there.

—Food getting cold.

—Make a whole dollar! A whole dollar! Hundred crickets! Jest know I can catch a hundred. Jest know it!!

—Gotta get up mighty early for crickets. You too little to be over in them woods before sun's up.

—Aw, shoot! Aunt Lilly! Bogie gone be with me.

—He too little too!

—Aw, Aunt Lilly! Shoot!

—Eat your dinner. . . reckon you two can care for yourself.

—Hot dog!!

—Bogie, you reckon I'll catch a hundred?

—I'm a catch more 'n that. Better stop talkin' and finish the cage. Told you to make it yesterday,

Continued on page 18

No, Lord!—none of us niggers never known nothin' 'bout readin' and writin'. Dere warn't no school for niggers, den, and I ain't never been to school a day in my life. Niggers was more skeered of newspapers dan dey is of snakes now.

Georgia Baker
Bullwhip Days
pages 8, 9

All de slaves knew how ter do hard work, fer dey was taught dat from de time dey was big enough ter work till dey died. Dat was de ole slaves' life. But dere was very few dat was taught er knows anything 'bout how ter find a job er how ter depend on demselves fer a livin'. But a few years of scrapin' and scratchin' fer deir own food, and it wasn't so hard.

Thomas Cole
Bullwhip Days
pages 68, 69

Urban America

*i first seed the guy
walkin up the street
with his corduroys
and his twisted up alphabet soup jacket
stompin his kicks
against the lonesome pavement
like it
not him
weren't gonna have no tomorrows
his eyes all aimed straight ahead
with they high beans on
he walk right up to me
bold as a mississippi horse fly
say "you loan me a sammich
sos i can git
some quadders
for the lottery machine."*

Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa
Lincoln, NE

LISTEN

Continued from page 17

Shug.

—Couldn't find the old screen door 'til last night, Bogie.

—Better hurry up; be daylight soon.

—We got all morning. Can't see good in the dark anyway.

—I ain't gone stay out in that sun past no ten o'clock; crickets either.

—Yeah, they leave soon as the dew leaves. Right?

—Right. Hey! We can go fishing.

Wanna go by the Tombigbee first?

—Naw. We get the crickets first. Let's go down by the sawmill field, look under the lumber. Hey, why you makin' the cage so big?

—Gone catch a hundred; told you.

—Ready?

—Uh huh; guess so.

—Got something to show you, Shug. And don't you dare tell Miss Lily 'cause she'll tell my daddy.

—I ain't no tattle tale.

—Sear?

—Sear.

—Look.

—Bogie! Playing cards!!

—Shh, don't talk so loud! I keep them hid near the outhouse. And I know how to play tunk!



Photo by Yvette Gant

Blackjack, too!

—Boy, if Rev. Talmadge finds out . . .
—Hush up, now! Sear you ain't gon' tell?
—Cross my heart, hope to die.
—Teach you how to play after we sell our crickets, O.K.?
—While we fishing.
—Yeah.
—Yonder is the highway, Bogie.
—Le's go over the fence. And watch for rattlers.
Scott if you smell watermelon.
—How we gon' see the crickets dark as it is?
—You can hear the chirp, crazy.
—Gimme a boost over the fence.
—Them new sneakers, Shug?
—Uh huh! My daddy sent them from Mobile!
—Boy! Wish I had me some new sneakers. Boy, I could *really* run!
—I can outrun Big Sandy now!
—Gone way from here!
—Honest! Swear!
—No kiddin'.
—Cross my heart. And my ma up in Detroit goin' send me some shoes too.
—Hey now!
—My daddy said I might even go up to Detroit to see my ma.

—Hey now! Boy, you bigtime! Shoes and Detroit and all!!!

—Hey now!

—Pull me up now, Shug.

—Getting light out. Look how red the sky is . . .

—Move, I'ma jump. Whee! Come on le's run along the highway until we get to the lumber yard.

—Wanna race?

—Ready . . . set—no fair; come on back. Ready . . . set . . . go!

. . . Running.

Never been so cold. Running, moving did not help. The ice-morning wind dashed to its target; found it. Shug stopped at the street and alley. He set his box down; he looked out into the dark snowy morning.

Listened . . . to the wind blow.

His empty stomach growled. He wiped his nose with his hand and coughed. His feet were cold, hurting.

“Ma,” he said. “Mama! Mama!” And he wiped tears from his face with his hand.

“Man!” he said. “What's wrong with you, Shug?”

His heart felt higher and his breath came faster. Smoke poured from his lungs into the winter air.



He rubbed his feet.

"Mobile." He tried to tie the string in the left sneaker; it broke. "Shit!"

He rubbed his feet again.

"Daddy," he said, "you goulda stayed with ma. You didn't have to leave us...ain't right...bastard."

He beat his right fist in his left open hand. "Bastard...sonofabitch!"

The falling snow covered his shoulders. He wiped water from his eyes and listened...to the wind blow.

"Aw, Lawd." He wiped his eyes again with his hand, picked up his box with its odds, moved from the alley onto Kirby Street where he saw her approaching in the dawn's white morning.

Shug watched the black purse. It became a vision of light. He crossed Kirby Street towards her.

"Miss?" Shug shouted. "Miss, wait!"

She began to move faster, looking here and there, for life.

"Miss, could I borrow fifty cents?"

She stared at him as if she had not heard his voice.

"Please ma'am, I'm hungry..."

"Don't touch me...get away...go on now..."

"Naw, ma'am, I jest wanna borrow fifty cent..."

"Get away," she screamed. "Get away!! Police!!"

"I'm hungry—"

"Help!!! Murder!!!"

"Don't run...just fifty cent..."

"Murder!!!"

Shug grabbed the black purse, hit the crying woman with his piece of iron, ran. She lay in the snow and cried. The white snow turned red. Now and then dogs howled; here and there a light was turned on in the transparent dwellings. Far away, he could hear sirens. Shug ran. He could hear the sound of crickets. Faster, faster...

...Running home from school, the dollar resting in his pocket. Whistling, *my buddy, since you went away* as he balanced himself on the log crossing Wire Creek, young Shug was so happy—a dollar! Hundred crickets!! And that's what everybody in school had said: *a dollar! a hundred crickets!!*

Running...The new sneakers snug on his little feet. Down by the Tombigbee to the muscadine trees; climbing them, eating the fruit and looking out into the big river. *Guess I won't go to school tomorrow, guess I'll go fishin'*

...Running up the gulley, faster than Big Sandy, to his hidden wagon-box and wheeee down the hill home, *a whole dollar! a hundred crickets!!*

As the bus passed through Jackson, Shug looked in the direction of the valley and his long ago



Photo by Yvette Gant

home. Through the glass, darkly, seconds of wagon-box happiness. He smiled.

The bus was soon leaving Jackson, crossing the Tombigbee Bridge, moving swiftly down the dark highway. It approached his father; it departed that prison. And Shug, the rider, thought of yesterdays and tomorrow—dreams. *Is them other lone riders lonely asd me?*

The Greyhound Bus slowed as it passed highway construction. Black prisoners in bright stripes labored with the red Alabama earth, singing in deep bass unison as guards kept rifles pointed. Some smiled and waved to the bus. And even together *each* seemed alone. Had he appeared that way when he died at seven and again at fifteen? What kind of loneliness is this death? *Will my daddy seem as he vaguely seemed yesterdays?*

"Mobile, Alabama," the driver said. "Mobile in ten minutes, folks."

Shug searched the corridors of the hospital until he found his father.

"Father?"

His eyes opened. He smiled.

"Father?"

"Lawd. Lawd have mercy," he said. "My boy! My son!"

"How you, father?"

an' dey foun' de body of a white man hangin' to a post oak tree, ober by Gran' Prairie. His name was Billings, an' he come from de Norf. He been ober roun' Livingston messin' up de niggers, tellin' 'em dey had been promised forty acres and a mule, an' dey ought to go 'head an' take 'em from de white folks.

*Henry Garry
Bullwhip Days
page 394*

Continued on page 20

LISTEN—Continued from page 19



Photo by Mark C. Southers

He shook his head. "Naw; call me daddy." They looked at each other, smiling.
 "Fifteen years?"
 "Yeah, fifteen."
 "You shoulda come and see'd me."
 "Naw. You shoulda come and seen *me*."
 They looked at each other.
 "What you been doing up there?"
 "Trying . . . to live again."
 "Rough?"
 "Yeah."
 "Ma died, didn't she?"
 "TB, thirteen years ago."
 Silence.
 "Ever get to collage?"
 "Didn't finish high school."
 "Work?"
 "Naw. Don't know how to do nothin'."
 "Rough."
 "Yeah."
 Silence.

Pass me that glass of water, please . . . straw's in the bag on the floor there."

Silence.
 "How do you' Pa look, boy?"
 "You awful faded-lookin' . . . small . . ."
 "Uh-huh; you can see my ribs." He smiled.
 "I'm dying . . . all a us on this floor is dying." He

chuckled from within and coughed.
 "It ain't funny, dad."
 "It eatin' all a us away, son."
 "Yeah, it ate me up when I was a kid."
 "Son?"
 "Don't call me that!"
 "You are, no matter what."
 "You killed him—murdered him—way back when he was seven; you sent him to where fig trees don't even grow."
 "Naw!"
 "And you killed him again when he was fifteen—"
 "Naw! Naw!"
 "—when Ma and me tried to live in darkness, you killed her. And I'm dead. I know it!"
 "Naw . . . you my boy. Don't know what you talkin' 'bout. Boy, I been dead for forty-seven years. And ever year I died; ever one of 'em. Look, I'm dying again . . . right where I was born . . . Ain't nothin' changed, boy. It a one room shack for seventeen younguns yesterdays or a one floor hospital todays."

"Daddy, I done cursed you so the past fifteen years . . . mouth is *burning*.
 "And I done drem't 'bout you for all a them fifteen years. Swore a thousand times I'd come up there and try to get work . . . and you and me

would be buddies again."
 "Yeah . . . and we can sing *my buddy since you went away again. Crap . . .*"
 The nurse: white and starch, sweat rings under both arms.
 "Get on 'way from him."
 She put a thermometer in his mouth.
 "My father . . . he my father."
 "Yes'm, this my boy. Miss Stanford . . . this is ah . . . ah?"
 Silence.
 "Didn't know you had a boy. Ain't Maude's, is it?"
 "No'm . . . he from Detroit."
 "Detroit? Well now, that's nice."
 "What's so nice about it?" Ma'm?"
 She removed the thermometer.
 "If you had to live here, you'd know."
 She left the two and moved to another patient.
 "Man, don't you dare call me yo' son. You killed yo' son and every dream he had when he was seven."
 "But, boy, I been dead *seven times* as long. And I never had a dream as I recollect except 'bout you. Boy . . . boy, you talk about fig trees blooming! Go outside this goddam hospital and you won't even see a blade a grass."
 "Bullshit, I'm going. Don't even know why I

came down to this damn place. It's hot; stinks..."

"It's a bitch, ain't it?"

"Yeah."

"Son... I think I was just holin' out until I could see you."

"I'll bet."

He smiled.

"Who wrote you 'bout me? Lily?"

"Yeah."

He closed his eyes; took Shug's hand, held it.

"It lonely here."

"It's lonely everywhere."

"I wish we could a sung *my buddy* again. Wish we could a gone fishin' and cricket catchin', son. But the Tombigbee, it muddy now; it ain't no fields for the dew neither. They was our friends, son, and they's gone."

"Turn my hand—"

"They's gone, boy, don't you see? Look at all a us here on this here floor, boy. If we had our fields and our...our gardens and well water...our fishin' on river bank and creek...huntin' for possum...wild berries and fruits, son, we wouldn't be eaten away in no goddamn Mobile General..."

"Paw, daddy, when I was little 'en you took me places, huntin' and fishin' 'en things like that, as I remember I didn't do nothin' if it wasn't for to make you glad that I was your son."

"I know, boy."

"Why...why did you have to send me to that land?"

"Don't recollect."

"And Ma? Why did you leave her?"

"Don't recollect. Maybe I do deep down, but boy, I ain't got the words or know-how to explain it. Maybe it like...like me never havin' nothin' to give yo' ma and you 'cause I couldn't get work. And maybe it 'cause yo' ma could always get work. Ain't sayin' it was good work, only sayin' it was work, boy. Don't know; ain't got the words to explain rightly what I mean."

They looked at each other.

"Let go my hand."

He released Shug's hand.

"Be seeing you. I'm going."

"Back North?"

He nodded his head. "Be seeing you...leaving you this time."

"Leaving me to die...this time?"

"Be...seeing you."

Son?"

"Uh huh."

"I'm sorry for...everythang."

"Me...me too, man."

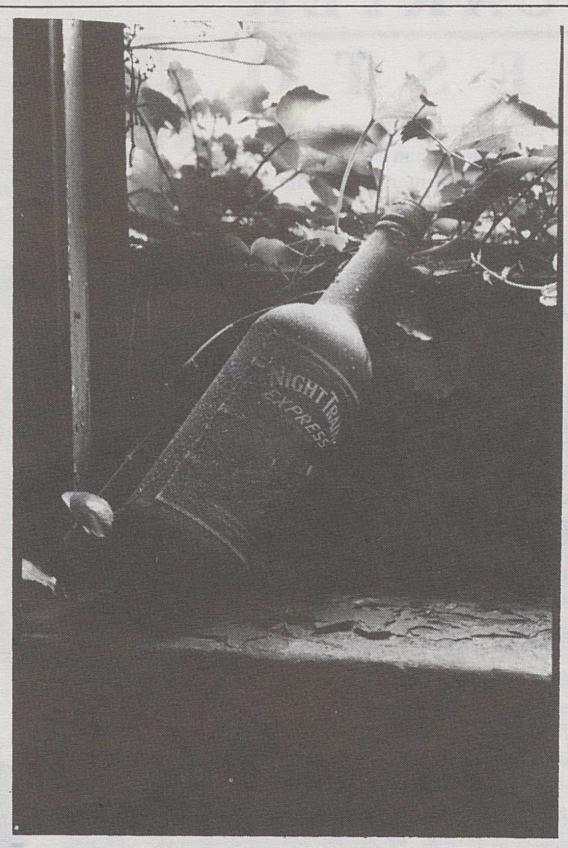


Photo by Eric Jones

Woodie King, Jr. is the drama critic for *Detroit Tribune*. His short stories appeared in anthologies including Langston Hughes' *Best Short Stories by Negro Writers*; *City Street*, a Bantam book. Feature articles in *Variety*, *Liberator*, *Black World*, *Drama Review*, *Black Theatre Magazine*, *New York Times*, *Rockefeller Foundation Quarterly*, *Association for Study on Negro Life and History*, *The Black Scholar*, and the recently published *Black Theatre: Present Condition* (1982).

King's screenplays include: *The Beast of Harlem*, *Jet!*, *Black Dreams*, *The Long Night* (co-writer), *Harlem Transfer*, (co-writer), *Sunday February 21: The Day Malcolm X Died*.

He has also edited: *A Black Quartet*, four one-act plays (NAL); *Black Drama Anthology*; *Short Stories by Black Writers* (NAL), *Poets & Prophets, Theory, Practice and Esthetic of Pan-African Revolution* (NAL), *Black Spirits: New Black Poets in America* (Random House); *Forerunners: Black Poets in America* (Howard University Press).

"Daddy
I done
cursed
you so
the
past
fifteen
years..."

You see, de white
folks don't git in de
spirit. Dey don't
shout, pray, hum,
an' sing all through
de services, lak us
do. Dey don't
believe in a heap o'
things us niggers
knows 'bout.

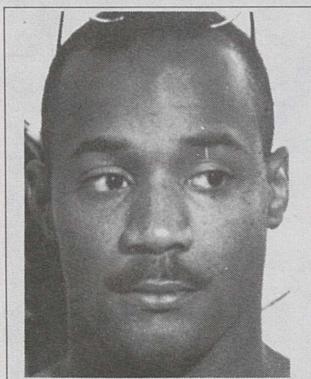
Minerva Grubbs
Bullwhip Days

page 85



STEVENS CARTER

MANIFESTO



For the last eight years, I have pursued one main quest: I have been "exploring the levers that control the fears and inhibitions of our minds." With this thought, I attempt to reflect in my work a sense of energy, action, turmoil, and being on the edge. It has always been my position to actively pursue the "human experience," as if in a visual laboratory, like the scientist in pursuit of his or her field of study.

For me, the human experience, although beautiful, is additionally challenging, often conflictive, and sometimes combative. With these thoughts, I have developed a self-appointed direction. With this direction I hope I am acknowledging a complicated state of being that we all know exists, but few dare to deal with. This state of being, this state of awareness must not be swept under the carpet. It must be acknowledged, it must be challenged and it must be embraced. Perhaps my thoughts can best be summed up with this poem:

*To strive, sometimes I wonder,
To lose, most times I doubt,
To worry, a pastime I wonder
and I doubt,
To gain, ever and again,
To thirst, for only I can taste the
salt of my blood,
They say that this is only the
beginning,
One zillion quarts of blood my
son.*

I will go on to say that my current body of work is called the Emblematic Series. During the

past year I have readdressed my focus with the human experiences that I have encountered. I would like to represent this focus in a simple, primitive, naive manner, but with a modern concept. Hopefully the Emblematic Series reflects this.

A six mural project with the Department of Corrections and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts has been instrumental for me in readdressing this focus. It is through this project I realized, as humans we share common fears and common inhibitions that help construct our daily lives. My fears are essentially the same fears as the individuals I encounter daily. They are only labeled differently. As I quickly cemented this into my mind I found new direction to concentrate on and new territory to investigate. I further realized the belief in one's self cannot be forsaken, cannot be taken for granted. I realized in my mind, an attitude of total self-worth. I found that no one was going to hand me anything, not in the long run. Everything I received was everything I earned. Yes, I believe 110 percent that you have to believe in your goals once you set them, despite all opposition. You must believe in the right things, yourself, and believe me you will witness personal growth. I applied this attitude to my work and my new series was born.

Stevens Carter was born, Sept. 16, 1958 in Plainfield, NJ. In 1980 Stevens received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Pittsburgh. Stevens has exhibited in several states including Texas, New York, New Jersey, California, and Pennsylvania. Currently Stevens splits his time between Pittsburgh and New York.

As a member of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Artist in Education advisory panel, Stevens' major projects include:
6 mural project: Department of Corrections and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

3 mural projects: Palmyra High School, Avon Grove Elementary, and Blue Mountain School District.





Ah'll Beatcha M



De rooster chew t'backer, de hen dip snuff
De biddy can't do it, but he struts his stuff.

Ole John, he was workin' for Massa and Massa had two hawses and he laked John, so he give John one of his hawses.

When John git to workin' 'em he'd haul off and beat Massa's hawse, but he never would his his'n. So then some white folks tol old Massa 'bout John beatin' his hawse and never beatin' his own. So Massa tol John if he ever heard tell of him layin' a whip on his hawse agin he was gointer take and kill John's hawse dead as a nit.

John tol 'im, "Massa, if you kill my hawse, Ah'll beatcher makin' money."

One day John hit ole Massa's hawse agin. Dey went and tolle Massa' bout it. He come down dere where John was haulin' trash, wid a great big ole knife and cut John's hawse's th'oat and he fell dead.

John jumped down off de wagon and skint his hawse, and tied de hide upon a stick and throwed it cross his shoulder, and went on down town.

Ole John was a fortune teller hisself but nobody 'round dere didn't know it. He met a man and de man ast John, "Whut's dat you got over yo' shoulder dere, John?"

"It's a fortune teller, boss."

"Make it talk some, John, and I'll give you a sack of money and a hawse and saddle, and five head of cattle."

John put de hide on de ground and pulled out de stick and hit 'cross de hawse hide and hold his head down dere to lissen.

"Dere's a man in yo' bed-room behind de bed talkin' to yo' wife."

De man went inside his house to see. When he come back out he said, "Yeah, John, you sho tellin' de truth. Make him talk some mo'."

John went to puttin' de stick back in de hide. "Naw, Massa, he's tired now."

De white man says, "Ah'll give you six head of sheeps and fo' hawses and fo' sacks of money."

John pulled out de stick and hit down on de hide and hold down his head to lissen.

"It's a man in yo' kitchen openin' yo' stove." De man went back into his house and come out agin and tolle John, "Yo, fortune-teller sho is right. Here's de things Ah promised you."

John rode on past Ole Massa's house wid all his sacks of money and drivin' his sheeps and cattle, whoopin' and crackin' his whip. "Yee, whoo-pee, yee!" Crack!

Massa said, "John, where did you git all dat?"

John said, "Ah tolle you if you kilt mah hawse Ah'd beatcher makin' money."

Massa said to 'im, "Reckon if Ah kilt mah hawse Ah'd make dat much money?"

"Yeah, Massa, Ah reckon so."

So ole Massa went out and kilt his hawse and went to town hollerin', "Hawse hide for sale! Hawse hide for sale!"

One man said, "Hold on dere. Ah'll give you two-bits for it to bottom some chears."

Ole Massa tolle 'im, "Youse crazy!" and went on hollerin' "Hawse hide for sale!"

"Ah'll gi' you twenty cents for it to cover some chears," another man said.

"You must be stone crazy! Why, dis hide is worth five thousand dollars."

De people all laughed at 'im so he took his hawse hide and throwed it away and went and bought hisself another hawse.

Ole John, he already rich, he didn't have tow ork but he jus' love to fool 'round hawses so he went to drivin'

hawse and buggy for Massa. And when nobody wasn't wid him, tolle old Massa 'bout it and he said, "John, Ah hear you been had yo' grandma ridin' in mah buggy. De first time Ah ketch her in it, Ah'm gointer kill 'er."

John tolle 'im, "If you kill my grandma, Ah'll beatcher makin' money."

Pretty soon some white folks tolle Massa dat John was takin' his gran'ma to town in his buggy and was hittin' his hawse and showin' off. So ole Massa come out dere and cut John's gran'ma's th'oat.

So John buried his gran'ma in secret and went and got his same ole hawse hide and keered it up town agin and went 'round talkin' 'bout, "Fortune-teller, fortune-teller!"

One man tolle 'im, "Why, John, make it talk some for me. Ah'll give you six head of goats, six sheeps, and a hawse and a saddle to ride 'im wid."

So John made it talk and de man was pleased so he give John more'n he promised 'im, and John went on back past Massa's house wid his stuff so ole Massa could see 'im.

Ole Massa run out and ast, "Oh, John, where did you git all dat?"

John said, "Ah tolle you if you kill mah gran'ma Ah'd beatcher makin' money."

Massa said, "You reckon if Ah kill mine, Ah'll make all dat?"

"Yeah, Ah reckon so."

So Massa runned and cut his gran'ma's th'oat and went up town hollerin' "gran'ma for sale! gran'ma for sale!"

Wouldn't nobody break a breath wid him. Dey thought he was crazy. He went on back home and grabbed John and tolle 'im, "You made me kill my gran'ma and my good hawse and



aking Money

By Zora Neale Hurston

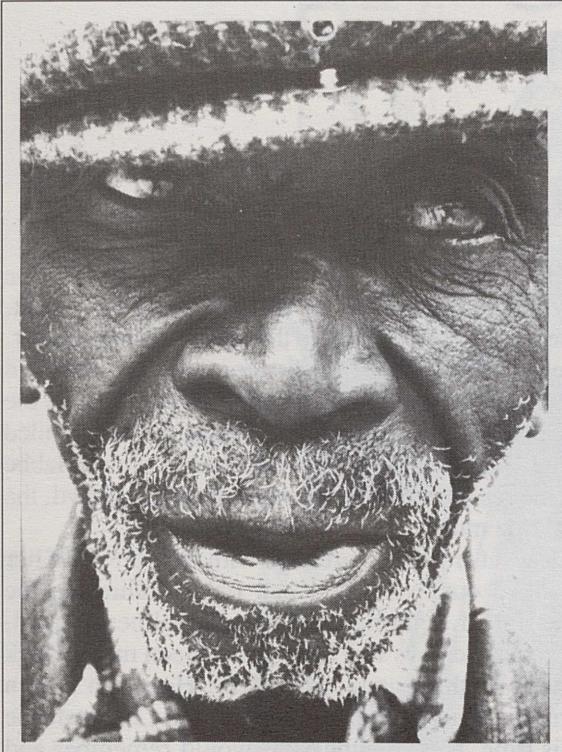


Photo by Eric Jones

So John went by Massa's house on a new hawse, wid a sack of money tied on each side of de saddle. Ole Massa seen 'im and ast, "Oh, John, where'd you git all dat?"

"Ah tole you if you throw me in de river Ah'd beatcher makin' money."
Massa ast, "Reckon if Ah let you throw me in de river, Ah'd make all dat?"
"Yeah, Massa, Ah know so."

John got ole Massa in de sack and keered 'im down to de river. John didn't forgit *his* weights. He put de weights on ole Massa and jus' befo' he throwed 'im out he said, "Goodbye, Massa, Ah hope you find all you lookin' for."

And dat wuz de las' of ole Massa.

"Dat wuz a long tale for a li'l boy lak you," George Thomas praised Julius.

Ah'm gointer throw you in de river."

John tole 'im, "If you throw me in de river, Ah'll beatcher makin' money."

"Naw you won't neither," Massa tole 'im. "You done made yo' last money and done yo' las' do."

He got ole John in de sack and keered 'im down to de river, but he done forgot his weights, so he went back home to git some.

While he was gone after de weights a toad frog come by dere and John seen 'im. So he hollered and said, "Mr. Hoptoad, if you open dis sack and let me out Ah'll give you a dollar."

Toad frog let 'im out, so he got a soft-shell turtle and put it in de sack wid two big ole bricks. Then old Massa got his weights and come tied 'em on de sack and throwed it in de river.

Whilst Massa was down to de water foolin' wid dat sack, John had done got out his hawse hide and went on up town agin hollerin', "Fortune-teller! fortune-teller!"

One rich man said, "Make it talk for me, John."

John pulled out de stick and hit on de hide, and put his ear down. "Uh man is in yo' smoke-house stealin' meat and another one is in yo' money-safe."

De man went inside to see and when he come back he said, "You sho kin tell de truth."

When a nigger died, they let his folks come out the fields to see him afore he died. They buried him the same day—take a big plank and bust it with a ax in the middle 'nuft to bend it back, and put the dead nigger in betwixt it. They'd cart him down to the graveyard on the place and not bury him deep 'nuft that buzzards wouldn't come circlin' round. Niggers mourns now, but in them days they wasn't no time for mournin'.

Mary Reynolds
Bullwhip Days
page 18

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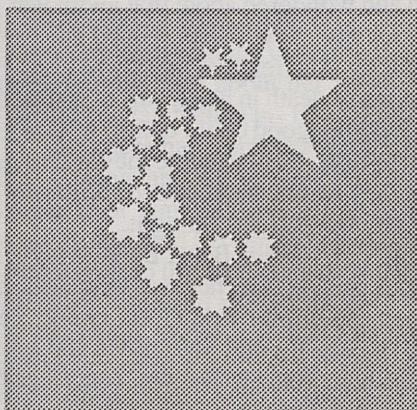
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LONG

B L A C K

SONG

By Richard Wright



Go t sleep, baby
Papas gone t town
Go t sleep, baby
The suns goin down

Go t sleep, baby
Yo candys in the sack
Go t sleep, baby
Papas comin back...

Over and over she crooned, and at each lull of her voice she rocked the wooden cradle with a bare black foot. But the baby squalled louder, its wail drowning out the song. She stopped and stood over the cradle, wondering what was bothering it, if its stomach hurt. She felt the diaper; it was dry. She lifted it up and patted its back. Still it cried, longer and louder. She put it back into the cradle and dangled a string of red beads before its eyes. The little black fingers clawed them away. She bent over, frowning, murmuring: "Whuts the mattah, chile? Yuh wan some watah?" She held a dripping gourd to the black lips, but the baby turned its head and kicked its legs. She stood a moment, perplexed. Whuts wrong wid that chile? She ain never carried on like this this tima day. She picked it up and went to the open door. "See the sun, baby?" she asked, pointing to a big ball of red dying between the branches of trees. The baby pulled back and strained its round black arms and legs against her stomach and shoulders. She knew it was tired; she could tell by the halting way it opened its mouth to draw in air. She sat on a wooden stool, unbuttoned the front of her dress, brought the baby closer and offered it a black teat.

"Don baby wan suppah?" It pulled away and went limp, crying softly, piteously, as though it would never stop. Then chile, what yuh wan? Yo ma cant hep yuh less she knows whut yuh wan. Tears gushed; four white teeth flashed in red gums; the little chest heaved up and down and round black fingers stretched floorward. Lawd, chile, whuts wrong wid yuh? She stooped slowly, allowing her body to be guided by the downward tug. As soon as the little fingers touched the floor the wail quieted into a broken sniffle. She turned the baby loose and watched it crawl toward a corner. She followed and saw the little fingers reach for the tail-end of the clock into the center of the floor. "Yuh wan tha ol clock?" She dragged after it, calling "Ahh!" Then it raised its hands and beat on the top

of the clock Bink! Bink! Bink! "Naw, yuhll hurt yo hans!" She held the baby and looked around. It cried and struggled. "Wait, baby!" She fetched a small stick from the top of a rickety dresser. "Here," she said, closing the little fingers about it. "Beat wid this, see?" She heard each blow landing squarely on top of the clock. Bang! Bang! Bang! And with each bang the baby smiled and said, "Ahh!" Mabbe thall keep yuh quiet erwhile. Mabbe Ah kin git some res now. She stood in the doorway. Lawd, tha chiles a pain! She mus be teethin. Er something...

She wiped sweat from her forehead with the bottom of her dress and looked out over the green fields rolling up the hillsides. She sighed, fighting a feeling of loneliness. Lawd, its sho hard t pass the days wid Silas gone. Been mos a week now since he took the wagon outta here. Hope ain nothin wrong. He must be buyin a heapa stuff there in Colwatah t be stayin all this time. Yes; maybe Silas would remember and bring that five-yard piece of red calico she wanted. Oh, Lawd! Ah hope he don fergit it!

She saw green fields wrapped in the thickening gloam. It was as if they had left the earth, those fields, and were floating slowly skyward. The afterglow lingered, red, dying, somehow tenderly sad. And far away, in front of her, earth and sky met in a soft swoon of shadow. A cricket chirped, sharp and lonely; and it seemed she could hear it chirping long after it had stopped. Silas oughta c mon soon. Ahm tireda staying here by mahself.

Loneliness ached in her. She swallowed, hearing Bang! Bang! Bang! Tom been gone t war mos a year now. N tha ol wars over n we ain heard nothing yit. Lawd, don let Tom be dead! She frowned into the gloam and wondered about that awful war so far away. They said it was over now. Yeah, Gawd had t stop em fo they killed everybody. She felt that merely to go so far away from home was a kind of death in itself. Just to go that far away was to be killed. Nothing good could come fro men going miles across the sea to fight. N how come they wanna kill each other? How come they wanna make blood? Killing was not what men ought to do. Shucks! she thought.

She sighed, thinking of Tom, hearing Bang! Bang! Bang! She saw Tom, saw his big black smiling face; her eyes went dreamily blank, drinking in the red afterglow. Yes, God; it now. Yes; it could have been Tom she was loving. She smiled and asked herself, Lawd, Ah wondah how would it been wid Tom? Against





Illustration by Brandon Jennings

the plush sky she saw a white bright day and a green cornfield and she saw Tom walking in his overalls and she was with Tom and he had his arm about her waist. She remembered how weak she had felt feeling his fingers sinking into the flesh of her hips. Her knees had trembled and she had had a hard time trying to stand up and not just sink right there to the ground. Yes; that was what Tom had wanted her to do. But she had held Tom up and he had held her up; they had held each other up to keep from slipping to the ground there in the green cornfield. Lawd! Her breath went and she passed her tongue over her lips. But that was not as exciting as that winter evening when the grey skies were sleeping and she and Tom were coming home from church down dark Lover's Lane. She felt the tips of her teats

tingling and touching the front of her dress as she remembered how he had crushed her against him and hurt her. She had closed her eyes and was smelling the acrid scent of dry October leaves and had gone weak in his arms and had felt she could not breathe any more and had torn away and run, run home. And the sweet ache which had frightened her then was stealing back to her loins now with the silence and the cricket calls and the red afterglow and Bang! Bang! Bang! Lawd, Ah wondah how would it been wid Tom?

She stepped out on the porch and leaned against the wall of the house. Sky sang a red song. Fields whispered a green prayer. And song and prayer were dying in silence and

Continued on page 28

LONG BLACK SONG

Continued from page 27

shadow. Never in all her life had she been so much alone as she was now. Days were never so long as these days; and nights were never so empty as these nights. She jerked her head impatiently, hearing Bang! Bang! Bang! Shucks! she thought. When Tom had gone something had ebbed so slowly that at first she had not noticed it. Now she felt all of it as though the feeling had no bottom. She tried to think just how it had happened. Yes; there had been all her life the long hope of white bright days and the deep desire of dark black nights and then Tom had gone. Bang! Bang! Bang! There had been laughter and eating and singing and the long cooking and sewing and sweeping and the deep dream of sleeping grey skies in winter. Always it had been like that and she had been happy. But no more. The happiness of those days and nights, of those green cornfields and grey skies had started to go from her when Tom had gone to war. His leaving had left an empty black hole in her heart, a black hole that Silas had come in and filled. But not quite. Silas had not quite filled that hole. No; days and nights were not as they were before.

She lifted her chin, listening. She had heard something, a dull throb like she had heard that day Silas had called her outdoors to look at the airplane. Her eyes swept the sky. But there was no plane. Mabbe its behin the house? She stepped into the yard and looked upward through paling light. There were only a few big wet stars trembling in the east. Then she heard the throb again. She turned, looking up and down the road. The throb grew louder, droning; and she heard Bang! Bang! Bang! There! A car! Wondah whuts a car doin coming out here? A black car was winding over a dusty road, coming toward her. Mabbe some white mans bringing Silas home wida loada goods? But, Lawd, Ah *hope* its no trouble! The car stopped in front of the house and a white man got out. Wondah whut he wans? She looked at the car, but could not see Silas. The white man was young; he wore a straw hat and had no coat. He walked toward her with a huge black package under his arm.

"Well, how yuh today, Aunty?"

"Oh, so-so. Its sure hot today, hunh?"

She brushed her hand across her forehead and sighed.

"Yeah; it is kinda warm."

"You busy?"

Naw, Ah ain doin nothin."

Ive got something to show you. Can I sit here, on your porch?"

"Ah reckon so. But, Mistah, Ah ain got no money."

"Haven't you sold your cotton yet?"

"Silas gone t town wid it now."

"Whens he coming back?"

"Ah don know. Ahm waitin fer im."

She saw the white man take out a handkerchief and mop his face. Bang! Bang! Bang! He turned his head and looked through the open doorway, into the front room.

"Whats all that going on in there?"

She laughed.

"Aw, thas jus Ruth."

"Whats she doing?"

"She beatin tha ol clock."

"Beating a *clock*?"

She laughed again.

"She wouldn't go t sleep so Ah give her tha ol clock t play wid."

The white man got up and went to the front door; he stood a moment looking at the black baby hammering on the clock. Bang! Bang! Bang!

"But why let her tear your clock up?"

"It ain no good."

"You could have it fixed."

"We ain got no money t be fixin' no clocks."

"Haven't you got a clock?"

"Naw."

"But how do you keep time?"

"We git erlong widout time."

"But how do you know when to get up in the morning?"

"We jus git up, thas all."

"But how do you know what time it is when you get up?"

"We git up wid the sun."

"And at night, how do you tell when its night?"

"It gits dark when the sun goes down."

"Haven't you ever had a clock?"

She laughed and turned her face toward the silent fields.

"Mistah, we don need no clock."

"Well, this beats everything! I don't see how in the world anybody can live without time."

"We just don need no time, Mistah."

The white man laughed and shook his head; she laughed and looked at him. The white man was funny. Jus like lil boy. Astin how do Ah know when t git up in the mawnin! She laughed again and mused on the baby, hearing Bang! Bang! Bang! She could hear the white man breathing at her side; she felt his eyes on her face. She looked at him; she saw he was looking at her breasts. Hes jus lika lil boy. Acks like he cant understand *nothin!*

"But you need a clock," the white man insisted. "Thats what Im out here for. I'm selling clocks and graphophones. The clocks are made right into the graphophones, a nice sort of combination, hunh? You can have music and time all at once. I'll show you . . ."

"Mistah, we don need no clock!"

"You dont have to buy it. It wont cost you anything just to

"But how do you keep time?"

"We get along without time."



look."

He unpacked the big black box. She saw the strands of his auburn hair glinting in the afterglow. His back bulged against his white shirt as he stooped. He pulled out a square brown graphophone. She bent forward, looking. Lawd, but its pretty! She saw the face of a clock under the horn of the graphophone. The gilt on the corners sparkled. The color of the wood glowed softly. It reminded her of the light she saw sometimes in the baby's eyes. Slowly she slid a finger over a beveled edge; she wanted to take the box into her arms and kiss it.

"Its eight o'clock," he said.

"Yeah?"

"It only costs fifty dollars. And you dont have to pay for it all at once. Just five dollars down and five dollars a month."

She smiled. The white man was just like a little boy. Jus like a chile. She saw him grinding the handle of the box.

There was a sharp, scratching noise; then she moved nervously, her body caught in the ringing coils of music.

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound...

She rose on circling waves of white bright days and dark black nights.

...and time shall be no more...

Higher and her she mounted.

Letter from Chicago, 1988

As in the '30s, people crowd boxcars. More than in Hong Kong. Come nightfall, roll themselves in sheets of plastic.

No one seems to notice. The lucky ones sleep in cars abandoned along the lake. Others bed behind trees or bushes in Lincoln Park.

Emanciwhat?

In his '20s, he shared a hymnal. After doughnuts, which we both gobbled prodigiously, I asked, "Man, what happened to your legs to make you limp so bad?" "Doctors done cut off all my toes. Frostbite."

Evil generation.

***Li Min Hua
Chicago, IL***

And the morning breaks...

Earth fell far behind, forgotten.

...eternal, bright and fair...

Echo after echo sounded.

When the saved of the earth shall gather...

Her blood surged like the deep dream of sleep in winter.

And when the roll is called up yonder...

She gave up, holding her breath.

I'll be there...

A lump filled her throat. She leaned her back against a post, trembling, feeling the rise and fall of days and nights, of summer and winter; surging, ebbing, leaping about her, beyond her, far out over the fields to where earth and sky lay folded in darkness. She wanted to lie down and sleep, or else leap up and shout. When the music stopped she felt herself coming back, being let down slowly. She sighed. It was dark now. She looked into the doorway. The baby was sleeping on the floor. Ah gotta git up n put tha chile t bed, she thought.

"Wasnt that pretty?"

"It wuz pretty, awright."

"When do you think your husbands coming back?"

"Ah don know, Mistah."

She went into the room and put the baby into the cradle. She stood again in the doorway and looked at the shadowy box that had lifted her up and carried her away. Crickets called. The dark sky had swallowed up the earth, and more stars were hanging, clustered, burning. She heard the white man sigh. His face was lost in shadow. She saw him rub his palms over his forehead. Hes just lika lil boy.

"Id like to see your husband tonight," he said. "Ive got to be in Lilydale at six o'clock in the morning and I wont be back through here soon. I got to pick up my buddy over there and we're heading North."

She smiled into the darkness. He was just like a little boy. A little boy selling clocks.

"Yuh sell them things alla time?" she asked.

"Just for the summer," he said. "I go to school in winter. If I can make enough money out of this Ill go to Chicago to school this fall..."

"Whut yuh gonna be?"

"Be? What do you mean?"

"Whut yuh goin to school fer?"

"Im studying science."

"Whuts tha?"

Ole Missus and young Missus told the little slave children that the stork brought the white babies to their mothers, but that the slave children were all hatched out from buzzards' eggs. And we believed it was true.

Katie Sutton
Bullwhip Days
page 39

Continued on page 30

LONG BLACK SONG
Continued from page 29

"Oh, er . . ." He looked at her. "Its about why things are as they are."

"Why things is as they *is*?"

Well, its something like that."

"How come yuh wanna study tha?"

"Oh, you wouldnt understand."

She sighed.

"Naw, Ah guess Ah wouldnt."

"Well, I reckon Ill be getting along," said the white man. "Can I have a drink of water?"

"Sho. But we ain got nothin but well-watah, n yuhll have t come n git."

"Thats all right."

She slid off the porch and walked over the ground with bare feet. She heard the shoes of the white man behind her, falling to the earth in soft whispers. It was dark now. She led him to the well, groped her way, caught the bucket and let it down with a rope; she heard a splash and the bucket grew heavy. She drew it up, pulling against its weight, throwing one hand over the other, feeling the cool wet of the rope on her palms.

"Ah don git watah outa here much," she said, a little out of breath. "Silas gits the watah mos of the time. This buckets too heavy fer me."

"Oh, wait! Ill help!"

WEDNESDAY

*stacks of things and stuff
without names*

*anonymous heaps made into euphemisms of themselves
by flattering sunlight*

*my friend and i must walk among these
the unidentified*

*with squinting eye and starchy jaw
must stretch out hesitant arms to point
to make up names*

*to feign confidence in speech
while starlings overhead watch dutifully
pretending not to mock our chore
but the reflections we throw off*

*reminding the sky of brass and monkeys
and brittle buttocks*

must remind the startlings too

*there is a twitch in their heads as they fly
disturbing shafts of soot they must pass through
their beaks poking through the blackness of it
like slow bullets*

Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa
Lincoln, NE

His shoulder touched hers. In the darkness she felt his warm hands fumbling for the rope.

"Where is it?"

"Here."

She extended the rope through the darkness. His fingers touched her breasts.

"Oh!"

She said it in spite of herself. He would think she was thinking about that. And he was a white man. She was sorry she had said that.

"Wheres the gourd?" he asked. "Gee, its dark!"

She stepped back and tried to see him.

"Here."

"I cant see!" he said, laughing.

Again she felt his fingers on the tips of her breasts. She backed away, saying nothing this time. She thrust the gourd out from her. Warm fingers met her cold hands. He had the gourd. She heard him drink; it was the faint, soft music of water going down a dry throat, the music of water in a silent night. He sighed and drank again.

"I was thirsty," he said. "I hadnt had any water since noon."

She knew he was standing in front of her; she could not see him, but she felt him. She heard the gourd rest against the wall of the well. She turned, then felt his hands full on her breasts. She struggled back.

"Naw, Mistah!"

"Im not going to hurt you!"

White arms were about her, tightly. She was still. But hes a *white* man. A *white* man. She felt his breath coming hot on her neck and where his hands held her breasts the flesh seemed to knot. She was rigid, poised; she swayed backward, then forward. She caught his shoulders and pushed.

"Naw, naw . . . Mistah, Ah cant do that!"

She jerked away. He caught her hand.

"Please . . ."

"Lemme go!"

She tried to pull her hand out of his and felt his fingers tighten. She pulled harder, and for a moment they were balanced, one against the other. Then he was at her side again, his arms about her.

I wont hurt you! I wont hurt you . . ."

She leaned backward and tried to dodge his face. Her breasts were full against him; she gasped, feeling the full length of his body. She held her head far to one side; she knew he was seeking her mouth. His hands were on her breasts again. A wave of warm blood swept into her stomach and loins. She felt his lips touching her throat and where he kissed it burned.

"Naw, naw . . ."

Her eyes were full of the wet stars and they blurred, silver and blue. Her knees were loose and she heard her own breathing; she was trying to keep from falling. But hes a *white*



man. A *white* man! Naw! Naw! And still she would not let him have her lips; she kept her face away. Her breasts hurt where they were crushed against him and each time she caught her breath she held it and while she held it it seemed that if she would let it go it would kill her. Her knees were pressed hard against his and she clutched the upper parts of his arms, trying to hold on. Her loins ached. She felt her body sliding.

"Gawd . . . "

He helped her up. She could not see the stars now; her eyes were full of the feeling that surged over her body each time she caught her breath. He held her close, breathing into her ear; she straightened, rigidly, feeling that she had to straighten or die. And then her lips felt his and she held her breath and dreaded ever to breathe again for fear of the feeling that would sweep down over her limbs. She held tightly, hearing a mountain tide of blood beating against her throat and temples. Then she gripped him, tore her face away, emptied her lungs in one long despairing gasp and went limp. She felt his hand; she was still, taut, feeling his hand, then his fingers. The muscles in her legs flexed and she bit her lips and pushed her toes deep into the wet dust by the side of the well and tried to wait and tried to wait until she could wait no longer. She whirled away from him and a streak of silver and blue swept across her blood. The wet ground cooled her palms and knee-caps. She stumbled up and ran, blindly, her toes flicking warm, dry dust. Her numbed fingers grabbed at a rusty nail in the post at the porch and she pushed ahead of hands that held her breasts. Her fingers found the door-facing; she moved into the darkened room, her hands before her. She touched the cradle and turned till her knees hit the bed. She went over, face down, her fingers trembling in the crumpled folds of his shirt. She moved and moved again and again, trying to keep ahead of the warm flood of blood that sought to catch her. A liquid metal covered her and she rode on the curve of white bright days and dark black nights and the surge of the long gladness of summer and the ebb of the deep dream of sleep in winter till a high red wave of hotness drowned her in a deluge of silver and blue and boiled her blood and blistered her flesh, *bangbangbang . . .*

II

"Yuh bettah go," she said.

She felt him standing by the side of the bed, in the dark. She heard him clear his throat. His belt-buckle tinkled.

"Im leaving that clock and graphophone," he said.

She said nothing. In her mind she saw the box glowing softly, like the light in the baby's eyes. She stretched out her legs and relaxed.

"You can have it for forty instead of fifty. Ill be by early in the morning to see if your husbands in."

She said nothing. She felt the hot skin of her body growing steadily cooler.

"Do you think hell pay ten on it? Hell only owe thirty then."

She pushed her toes deep into the quilt, feeling a night wind blowing through the door. Her palms rested lightly on top of her breasts.

"Do you think hell pay ten on it?"

"Huhn?"

"Ah don know," she whispered.

She heard his shoe hit against a wall; footsteps echoed on the wooden porch. She started nervously when she heard the roar of his car; she followed the throb of the motor till she heard it when she could hear it no more, followed it till she heard it roaring faintly in her ears in the dark and silent room. Her hands moved on her breasts and she was conscious of herself, all over; she felt the weight of her body resting heavily on shucks. She felt the presence of fields lying out there covered with night. She turned over slowly and lay on her stomach, her hands tucked under her. From somewhere came a creaking noise. She sat upright, feeling fear. The wind sighed. Crickets called. She lay down again, hearing shucks rustle. Her eyes looked straight up in the darkness and her blood soured. She had lain a long time, full of a vast peace, when a far away tinkle made her feel the bed again. The tinkle came through the night; she listened, knowing that soon she would hear the rattle of Silas' wagon. Even then she tried to fight off the sound of Silas' coming, even then she wanted to feel the peace of night filling her again;

Continued on page 32

Us had pretty white dresses for Sunday. Marse Alec wanted evvybody on his place dressed up dat day. He sent his houseboy, Uncle Harris, down to de cabins evvy Sunday mornin' to tell evvy slave to clean hisself up. Dey warn't never give no chance to forgit. Dere was a big old room set aside for a washroom. Folkses laughs at me now 'cause I ain't never stopped takin' a bath evvy Sunday mornin'.

Georgia Baker
Bullwhip Days
page 7

Continued from page 31

but the tinkle grew louder and she heard the jangle of a wagon and the quick trot of horses. Thas Silas! She gave up and waited. She heard horses neighing. Out of the window bare feet whispered in the dust, then crossed the porch, echoing in soft booms. She closed her eyes and saw Silas come into the room in his dirty overalls as she had seen him come in a thousand times before.

"Yuh sleep, Sarah"

She did not answer. Feet walked across the floor and a match scratched. She opened her eyes and saw Silas standing over her with a lighted lamp. His hat was pushed far back on his head and he was laughing.

"Ah reckon yuh thought Ah waznt never comin back, hunh? Cant yuh wake up? See, Ah got that red cloth yuh wanted . . ." He laughed again and threw the red cloth on the mantel.

"Yuh hongry?" she asked.

"Naw, Ah kin make out till mawnin." Shucks rustled as he sat on the edge of the bed. "Ah got two hundred a fifty fer mah cotton."

"Two hundred n fifty?"

"Nothin different! N guess whut Ah done?"

"Ah bought ten mo acres o lan. Got em from ol man Burgess. Paid im a hundred n fifty dollahs down. Ahll pay the rest next year ef things go erlong awright. Ahma have t git a man t hep me nex spring . . ."

"Yuh mean hire somebody?"

"Sho, hire somebody! Whut yuh think? Ain tha the way the white folks do? Ef yuhs gonna git anywherees yuhs gotta do just like they do." He paused. "Whut yuh been doin since Ah been gone?"

"Nothin. Cookin, cleanin, n . . ."

"How Ruth?"

"She awright." She lifted her head. "Silas, yuh git any let-tahs?"

"Naw. But Ah heard Tom wuz in town."

"In town?"

She sat straight up.

"Yeah, thas whut the folks wuz sayin at the sto."

"Back from the war?"

"Ah ast erroun t see ef Ah could fin im. But Ah couldnt."

"Lawd, Ah wish hed c mon home."

"Them white folks shos glad the wars over. But things wuz kinda bad there in town. Everywhere Ah looked wuznt nothin but black n white soljers. N them white folks beat up a black soljer yestiddy. He was jus in from France. Wuz still wearin his soljer suit. They claimed he sassed a white woman . . ."

"Who wuz he?"

"Ah don know. Never saw im befo."

"Yuh see An Peel?"

"Naw."

"Silas!" she said reprovingly.

"Aw, Sarah, Ah jus couldnt git out there."

"Whut else yuh bring sides the cloth?"

"Ah got yuh some high-top shoes." He turned and looked at her in the dim light of the lamp. "Woman, ain yuh glad Ah bought yuh some shoes n cloth?" He laughed and lifted his feet to the bed. "Lawd, Sarah, yuhs sho sleepy, ain yuh?"

"Bettah put tha lamp out, Silas . . ."

"Aw . . ." He swung out of the bed and stood still for a moment. She watched him, then turned her face to the wall.

"Whuts that by the windah?" he asked.

She saw him bending over and touching the graphophone with his fingers.

"Thasa graphophone."

"Where yuh git it from?"

"A man lef it here."

"When he bring it?"

"Today."

"But how come he t leave it?"

"He says hell be out here in the mawnin t see ef yuh wans t buy it."

He was on his knees, feeling the wood and looking at the gilt on the edges of the box. He stood up and looked at her.

"Yuh ain never said yuh wanted one of these things."

She said nothing.

"Where wuz the man from?"

"Ah don know."

"He white?"

"Yeah."

He put the lamp back on the mantel. As he lifted the globe to blow out the flame, his hand paused.

"Whos hats this?"

She raised herself and looked. A straw hat lay bottom upwards on the edge of the mantel. Silas picked it up and looked back to the bed, to Sarah.

"Ah guess its the white mans. He must a lef it . . ."

"Whut he doin *in our room*?"

"He wuz talkin t me bout that graphophone."

She watched him go to the window and stoop again to the box. He picked it up, fumbled with the price-tag and took the box to the light.

"Whut this thing cos?"

"Forty dollahs."

"But its marked fifty here."

"Oh, Ah means he said fifty . . ."

He took a step toward the bed.

"Yuh lyin t me!"

"Silas!"

He heaved the box out of the front door; there was a smashing, tinkling noise as it bounded off the front porch

**"Yuh jus as well cmon
back n git yo beatin!"**

and hit the round. "Whut in hell yuh lie t me fer?"

"Yuh broke the box!"

"Ahma break yo Gawddam neck ef yuh don stop lyin t me!"

"Silas, Ah ain lied t yuh!"

"Shut, up Gawddammit! Yuh did!"

He was standing by the bed with the lamp trembling in his hand. She stood on the other side, between the bed and the wall.

"How come yuh tell me that thing cos *forty* dollahs when it cos *fifty*?"

"Thas whut he tol me."

"How come he take *ten* dollahs off fer yuh?"

"He ain took nothing off fer me, Silas!"

"Yuh lyin t me! N yuh lied t me bout Tom, too!"

She stood with her back to the wall, her lips parted, looking at him silently, steadily. Their eyes held for a moment. Silas looked down, as though he were about to believe her. Then he stiffened.

"Whos this?" he asked, picking up a short, yellow pencil from the crumpled quilt.

She said nothing. He started toward her.

"Yuh wan me t take mah raw-hide whip n make yuh talk?"

"Naw, naw, Silas! Yuh wrong! He wuz figgerin wid tha pencil!"

He was silent a moment, his eyes searching her face.

"Gawddam yo black soul t hell, don yuh try lyin t me! Ef yuh start layin wid white men Ahll hosswhip yuh t a incha yo life. Shos theres a Gawd in Heaven Ah will! From sunup t sundown Ah works mah guts out t pay them white trash bastards whut Ah owe em, n then Ah comes n fins they been in mah house! Ah cant go into their houses, n yuh know Gawddam well Ah cant! They don have no mercy on no black folks; wes jus like dirt under their feet! Fer ten years Ah slaves lika dog t git mah farm free, givin ever penny Ah kin t em, n then Ah comes n fins they been in mah house . . ." He was speechless with outrage. "If yuh wans t eat at mah table yuhs gonna keep them white trash bastards out, yuh hear? Tha white ape kin come n git tha damn box n Ah ain gonna pay im a cent! He had no bisness leavin it here, n yuh had no bisness lettin im! Ahma tell tha sonofabitch something when he comes out here in the mawnin, so hep me Gawd! Now git back in tha bed!"

She slipped beneath the quilt and lay still, her face turned to the wall. Her heart thumped slowly and heavily. She heard him walk across the floor in his bare feet. She heard the bottom of the lamp as it rested on the mantel. She stiffened when the room darkened. Feet whispered across the floor again. The shucks rustled from Silas' weight as he sat on the edge of the bed. She was still, breathing softly. Silas was mumbling. She felt sorry for him. In the darkness it seemed that she could see the hurt look on his black face. The crow of a rooster came from far away, came so faintly that it seemed she had not heard it. The bed sank and the shucks cried out in dry whispers; she knew Silas had stretched out. She heard him sigh. Then she jumped because he jumped. She could feel the tenseness of his body; she knew he was sitting bolt upright. She felt his hands fumbling jerkily under the quilt. Then the bed heaved amid a wild shout of shucks and Silas' feet hit the floor with a loud boom. She snatched herself to her elbows, straining her eyes in the dark, wondering what was wrong now. Silas was moving about, cursing under his breath.

"Don wake Ruth up!" she whispered.

"Ef yuh say one mo word t me Ahma slap yuh inter a black spasm!"

She grabbed her dress, got up and stood by the bed, the tips of her fingers touching the wall behind her. A match flared in yellow flame; Silas' face was caught in a circle of light. He was looking downward, staring intently at a white wad of cloth balled in his hand. His black cheeks were hard, set; his lips were tightly pursed. She looked closer; she saw that the white cloth was a man's handkerchief. Silas' fingers loosened; she heard the handkerchief hit the floor softly, damply. The match went out.

"Yuh little bitch!"

Her knees gave. Fear oozed from her throat to her stomach. She moved in the dark toward the door, struggling with the dress, jamming it over her head. She heard the thick skin of Silas' feet swish across the wooden planks.

"Ah got mah raw-hide whip n Ahm takin yuh t the barn!"

At dem sales, dey would put a nigger on de scales and weight him, and den de biddin' would start. If he wuz young and strong, de biddin' would start round a hundred and fifty dollars, and de highest bidder got de nigger. A good young breedin' 'oman brung two thousand dollars easy, 'cause all de marsters wanted to see plenty of strong healthy chillun comin' on, all de time. Cyarpenters and bricklayers and blacksmiths brung fancy prices, from three thousand to five thousand dollars, sometimes. A nigger what warn't no more'n jes' a good field hand brung 'bout two hundred dollars.

Willis Coter
Bullwhip Days
pages 287, 288

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Illustration by C.E. Hull

New South Wales, Australia

Story by Carol Dixon of Brooklyn, New York

When his oldest son's first tooth came out, he missed it, because he wasn't there. He missed the small, bright eyes, wide with the scary anticipation of pain. A pain being carefully measured against the untested mysteries of a magical tooth fairy. He wasn't there to see that.

And he missed the feel of his wife's hands, gently nudging him in the middle of the night to ask if he had any loose change to slip under the boy's pillow.

And that first snaggle-tooth grin, full of giggles, joy and pride, a grin that could ignite a warmth in him. A warmth that glowed, filling all the old hurts and melting the corners of his own rigid mouth. This feeling was lost to him because he wasn't there. And he wasn't there, because on that bleak Friday afternoon, he committed a crime...the crime of wearing an old army jacket and Black skin...poor Black skin.

It wasn't until that day, that Friday, that he realized the seriousness of his crime, a crime he had unwittingly committed on countless occasions. He had never intentionally placed himself outside the realm of the law, having been thoroughly schooled about his chances with it. And this very special, very specific Black education, helped him to choose early in life to follow a path that led him away from any confrontations with the law. But his deci-

sion to obey the law also led him into a false sense of security about his immunity from it, and he never felt the need to develop his seventh sense...the sense to be leery of it. Not then anyway, and certainly not that day, that bleak Friday, some ages and ages ago.

Thankful over a new fifteen dollar raise, he stopped at a bar, the first bar he came to, a bar where he was a stranger, to celebrate. The need to celebrate, modestly of course, arising from a

kind of inner sense of accomplishment, the additional money allowing him to visit a place he hadn't been to in a long time . . . a place deep inside him . . . the place where his dreams were stored away. He felt in control of his life again. Instead of a tool, he felt like a man. Surely that was worth a few beers.

His impatience, his sense of urgency, was understandable. The reality of how small a difference the money would actually make in effecting some chance in his life, or his family's life, might set in and he could lose the feeling of control and the need to celebrate would seem futile and empty. So he held on, tightly, to the feeling, hurriedly ushering it into the first bar that he came to.

And in this strange setting, he sought to shed his strangeness so that other men would see the man in him. The few extra dollars in his pocket gave him the courage to touch that place where his dreams were stored and he aligned himself with the other men who were gathered there, and one in particular, who had mysterious, laughing eyes.

He talked of men things . . . women and baseball, old times, new ways, living and surviving, and the speed of cars. And all the while they talked, the mysterious eyes laughed at him. He tried to look deep inside the, to see the joke he could not hear. But they only continued to smile hauntingly at him. He found himself caught up in their secret, and they held him so intensely, that he didn't see their hands picking his pocket. And by the time he discovered that the joke was on him, the laughing eyes were well on their way. In one, smooth gesture, they had taken his rent, his lights, his gas, and most importantly, the food from his children's mouths.

With their laughter echoing in his ears and pounding against his brain, in desperation, he ran from the bar, unmindful of any direction and already fully aware of the futility in his actions. Driven now by anger and blinded by humiliation, the eyes screaming in his head, he ran on, faster and faster, into the black night. He found flight in the running, being momentarily spared the look of disappointment on his wife's face. Realizing how costly the price of a few beers had been, and the hours of labor and sweat it would take to make up for the carelessness of a few fleeting moments, he ran on, harder and harder, trying to elude the feeling of hopelessness that matched him stride for stride.

Lost now in a private game of speed and distance, he felt himself being jerked, suddenly, from the night. He was thrown back violently into a brick wall and his already pounding head absorbed the full impact and exploded against it. But just before he crossed over into nothingness, he looked into the slimy grin that smirked beneath the raised billy club of one of New York's finest. A few blocks away, an officer was being lifted into an ambulance, his throat slashed by a man wearing an old army jacket and Black skin.

HE came to in a world that was no longer real for him. He lay shackled to a hospital bed, swollen, in pain, and blind in one eye. He lived in a dream now. He wandered through space

and time, but he was unaware of them. He tried to balance himself on the periphery of proceedings that had nothing to do with him, yet decided his fate.

He watched. Watched as his bloodless pocket knife became an attempted murder weapon. He watched the blank, cold eyes of the officer with the horrible scar across his neck. Those eyes told him, whenever he caught them looking, that they weren't really certain, weren't really sure, but they also told him that it didn't matter, it made no difference, they didn't care, someone had to pay. He watched the overworked and frustrated eyes of his court appointed lawyer avoiding his at every opportunity. And finally, he watched as a dozen of Monday's children matched the colorless words of colorless men against his Black skin. So that by the time he heard them take away his freedom, he knew that he had never really had any. His crime was a simple one. He wore an old army jacket and Black skin . . . poor, Black skin.

Now he lives in a world where time is marked by meals, and the hardest job he has is to keep his brain from asking his mind, why? And every other Thursday, his wife comes and feeds the outside world to him through her words. And he eats them greedily, but they never satisfy his hunger.

So when his oldest son's first tooth came out, he missed it, because he wasn't there. And in the boy's mouth there is a hollow space that is truly empty. And his condition and his wife's loneliness meet there, and they fill the space with horror stories, where fairy tales should have been. And in that space a wisdom tooth grows, wise in things foreign to most children. The new tooth is big and awkward and seems strangely out of place next to the others. A tooth honed on a necessary knowledge until it has a sharp cutting edge. A man-tooth.

His wife sits in front of him on one of those every other Thursdays and smiles at him through her pain. And through a tired grin, she tries to nourish him with the story of his oldest son's tooth.

She tells him how she pulled the boy's tooth out, how she calmed him, allayed his fears, promising him that it wouldn't hurt. But he can see, even through his one good eye, that deep behind her saddened face, she knew that it had.



Carol Dixon has received the John Oliver Killens Fiction Award, The John Golden Memorial Prize for Literary Promise, and Black Enterprise's 1986 Black Writer Achiever of the Year Award.

Ms. Dixon's current work includes a short story collection, *PROMISES BROKEN, PROMISES KEPT* and her short stories have been published in *Black Southern Voices* and *The Obsidian*.

Ms. Dixon is a writer and writing consultant for Writer's Insight, an organization of professional writers who train teachers to help their students become better writers. She lives in New York with her fifteen year old daughter, Tracey.

LONG BLACK SONG
Continued from page 33

HOW IT CONTINUES TO FLOURISH

*I read in the paper about Howard Beach,
how people there don't like blacks walking through
or buying a pizza, don't like them breaking down,
using their phones to get help.*

*I read how some kids left a party
with baseball bats to chase three black men
forcing them onto the parkway
where one was killed.*

*I almost admired that cruelty when I grew up there,
when the "Fellow Chargers" forced a retarded man
to give them blow jobs. Then I learned*

*what it meant to be forced when one pinned
me on the ground, his hand in my pants,
and later when the "Boppers" tied my hands
behind my back, slapped my belly red for hours.*

*Another gang marched me along the boulevard,
forcing me to run in and out of traffic on chicken feet.
If you make it to the other side, they said,
we won't shoot you.*

*I remember how my friends beat up a Jewish kid, stole
his yarmulke and took turns wearing it
over their crotches as they danced around like goats.*

*After, these boys returned to the party
filled with the hunger of their fathers
to impregnate their young women*

*with sperm that thrashes into their wombs,
whips through the moist channels, multiplies,
and keeps repeating.*

Peter E. Murphy
Ventnor, NJ

She ran on tiptoe to the porch and paused, thinking of the baby. She shrank as something whines through the air. A red streak of pain cut across the small of her back and burned its way into her body, deeply.

"Silas!" she screamed.

She grabbed for the post and fell in dust. She screamed again and crawled out of reach.

"Git t the barn, Gawddammit!"

She scrambled up and ran through the dark, hearing the baby

cry. Behind her leather thongs hummed and feet whispered swiftly over the dusty ground.

"C mere, huh bitch! C mere, Ah say!"

She ran to the road and stopped. She wanted to go back and get the baby, but she dared not. Not as long as Silas had that whip. She stiffened, feeling that he was near.

"Yuh jus as well c mon back n git yo beatin!"

She ran again, slowing now and then to listen. If she only knew where he was she would slip back into the house and get the baby and walk all the way to Aunt Peel's.

"Yuh ain comin back in mah house till Ah beat yuh!"

She was sorry for the anger she knew he had out there in the field. She had a bewildering impulse to go to him and ask him not to be angry; she wanted to tell him that there was nothing to be angry about; that what she had done did not matter; that she was sorry; that after all she was his wife and still loved him. But there was no way she could do that now; if she went to him he would whip her as she had seen him whip a horse.

"Sarah! Sarah!"

His voice came from far away. Ahm goin git Ruth. Back through dust she sped, going on her toes, holding her breath.

"Saaaarah!"

From far off his voice floated over the fields. She ran into the house and caught the baby in her arms. Again she sped through dust on her toes. She did not stop till she was so far away that his voice sounded like a faint echo falling from the sky. She looked up; the stars were paling a little. Mus be gittin near mawnin. She walked now, letting her feet sink softly into the cool dust. The baby was sleeping; she could feel the little chest swelling against her arm. She looked up again; the sky was solid black. Its gittin near mawnin. Ahma take Ruth t An Peels. N mabbe Ahll fin Tom... But she could not walk all that distance in the dark. Not now. Her legs wer tired. For a moment a memory of surge and ebb rose in her blood; she felt her legs straining, upward. She sighed. Yes, she would go to the sloping hillside back of the garden and wait until morning. Then she would slip away. She stopped, listened. She heard a faint, rattling noise. She imagined Silas' kicking or throwing the smashed graphophone. Hes mad! Hes sho mad! Aw, Lawd!... She stopped. stock still, squeezing the baby till it whimpered. What would happen when that white man came out in the morning? She had forgotten him. She would have to head him off and tell him. Yeah, cause Silas jus mad ernuff t kill! Lawd! hes mad ernuff t kill!

III

She circled the house widely, climbing a slope, groping her way, holding the baby high in her arms. After awhile she stopped and wondered where on the slope she was. She remembered there was an elm tree near the edge; if she could find it she would know. She groped farther, feeling with her feet. Ahm gittin los! And she did not want to fall with the baby.

Ahma stop here, she thought. When morning came she would see the car of the white man from this hill and she would run down the road and tell him to go back; and then there would be no killing. Dimly she saw in her mind a picture of men killing and being killed. White men killed the black and black men killed the white. White men killed the black men because they could, and the black men killed the white men to keep from being killed. And killing was blood. Lawd, Ah wish Tom wuz here. She shuddered, sat on the ground and watched the sky for signs of morning. Mabbe Ah oughta walk on down the road? Naw... Her legs were tired. Again she felt her body straining. Then she saw Silas holding the white man's handkerchief. She heard it hit the floor, softly, damply. She was sorry for what she had done. Silas was as good to her as any black man could be to a black woman. Most of the black women worked in the fields as croppers. But Silas had given her her own home, and that was more than many others had done for their women. Yes, she knew how Silas felt. Always he had said he was as good as any white man. He had worked hard and saved his money and bought a farm so he could grow his own crops like white men. Silas hates white folks! Lawd, he sho hates em!

The baby whimpered. She unbuttoned her dress and nursed her in the dark. She looked toward the east. There! A tinge of grey hovered. It wont be long now. She could see ghostly outlines of trees. Soon she would see the elm, and by the elm she would sit till it was light enough to see the road.

The baby slept. Far off a rooster crowed. Sky deepened. She rose and walked slowly down a narrow, curving path and came to the elm tree. Standing on the edge of a slope, she saw a dark smudge in a sea of shifting shadows. That was her home. Wondah how come Silas didnt light the lamp? She shifted the baby from her right hip to her left, sighed, struggled against sleep. She sat on the ground again, caught the baby close and leaned against the trunk of a tree. Her eye-lids drooped and it seemed that a hard, cold hand caught hold of her right leg or was it her left leg—she did not know which—and began to drag her over a rough litter of shucks and when she strained to see who it was that was pulling her no one was in sight but far ahead was darkness and it seemed that out of the darkness some force came and pulled her like a magnet and she went sliding along over a rough bed of screeching shucks and it seemed that a wild fear made her want to scream but when she opened her mouth to scream she could not scream and she felt she was coming to a wide black hole and again she made ready to scream and then it was too late for she was already over teh wide black hole falling falling falling...

She awakened with a start and blinked her eyes in the sunshine. She found she was clutching the baby so hard that it had begun to cry. She got to her feet, trembling from fright of the dream, remembering Silas and the white man and Silas' running her out of the house and the white man's coming. Silas was standing in the front yard; she caught her breath. Yes, she had to go and head that white man off! Naw! She could not do

that, not with Silas standing there with that whip in his hand. If she tried to climb any of those slopes he would see her surely. And Silas would never forgive her for something like that. If it were anybody but a white man it would be different.

Then, while standing there on the edge of the slope looking wonderingly at Silas striking the whip against his over-all-leg—and then, while standing there looking—she froze. There came from the hills a distant throb. Lawd! The baby whimpered. She loosened her arms. The throb grew louder, droning. Hes comin fas! She wanted to run to Silas and beg him not to bother the white man. But he had that whip in his hand. She should not have done what she had done last night. This was all her fault. Lawd, ef anything happens t im its mah blame... Her eyes watched a black car speed over the crest of a hill. She should have been out there on the road instead of sleeping here by the tree. But it was too late now. Silas was standing in the yard; she aw him turn with a nervous jerk and sit on the edge of the porch. He was holding the whip stiffly. The car came to a stop. A door swung open. A white man got out. Thas im! She saw another white man in the front seat of the car. N thats his buddy... The white man who had gotten out walked over the ground, going to Silas. They faced each other, the white man standing up and Silas sitting down; like toy toy men they faced each other. She saw Silas point the whip to the smashed graphophone. The white man looked down and took a quick step backward. The white man's shoulders were bent and he shook his head from left to right. Then Silas got up and they faced each other again; like two dolls, a white doll and a black doll, they faced each other in the valley below. The white man pointed his finger into Silas' face. Then Silas' right arm went up; the whip flashed. The white man turned, bending, flinging his hands to shield his head. Silas' arm rose and fell, rose and fell. She saw the white man crawling in dust, trying to get out of reach. She screamed when she saw the other white man get out of the car and run to Silas. Then all three were on the ground, rolling in dust, grappling for the whip. She clutched the baby and ran. Lawd! Then she stopped, her mouth hanging open. Silas had broken loose and was running toward the house. She knew he was going for his gun.

"Silas!"

Running, she stumbled and fell. The baby rolled in the dust and bawled. She grabbed it up and ran again. The white men were scrambling for their car. She reached level ground, running. Hell be killed! Then again she stopped. Silas was on the front porch, aiming a rifle. One of the white men was climbing into the car. The other was standing waving his arms, shouting at Silas. She tried to scream, but choked; and she could not scream till she heard a shot ring out.

"Silas!"

One of the white men was on the ground. The other was in the car. Silas was aiming again. The car started, running in a cloud of dust. She fell to her knees and hugged the baby close.

Continued on page 38



LONG BLACK SONG

Continued from page 37

She heard another shot, but the car was roaring over the top of the southern hill. Fear was gone now. Down the slope she ran. Silas was standing on the porch, holding his gun and looking at the fleeing car. Then she saw him go to the white man lying in dust and stoop over him. He caught one of the man's legs and dragged the body into the middle of the road. Then he turned and came slowly back to the house. She ran, holding the baby, and fell at his feet.

"Silas!"

IV

"Git up, Sarah!"

His voice was hard and cold. She lifted her eyes and saw blurred black feet. She wiped tears away with dusty fingers and pulled up. Something took speech from her and she stood with bowed shoulders. Silas was standing still, mute; the look on his face condemned her. It was as though he had gone far off and had stayed a long time and had come back changed even while she was standing there in the sunshine before him. She wanted to say something, to give herself. She cried.

"Git the chile up, Sarah!"

She lifted the baby and stood waiting for him to speak, to tell her something to change all this. But he said nothing. He walked toward the house. She followed. As she attempted to go in, he blocked the way. She jumped to one side as he threw the red cloth outdoors to the ground. The new shoes came next. Then Silas heaved the baby's cradle. It hit the porch and a rocker splintered; the cradle swayed for a second, then fell to the ground, lifting a cloud of brown dust against the sun. All of her clothes and the baby's clothes were thrown out.

"Silas!"

She cried, seeing blurred objects sailing through the air and hearing them hit softly in the dust.

"Git yo things n go!"

"Silas!"

"Ain no use yuh sayin *nothin* now!"

"But theyll kill yuh!"

"There ain *nothin* Ah kin do. N there ain *nothin* yuh kin do. Yuh done done too Gawddam much awrady. Git yo things n go!"

"Theyll kill yuh, Silas!"

He pushed her off the porch.

"GIT YO THINGS N GO T AN PEELS!"

"Les both go, Silas!"

"Ahm stayin here till they come back!"

She grabbed his arm and he slapped her hand away. She dropped to the edge of the porch and sat looking at the ground.

"Go way," she said quietly. "Go way fo they comes. Ah didnt mean no harm..."

"Go way fer whut?"

"Theyll kill yuh..."

"It don make no difference." He looked out over the sun-filled fields. "Fer ten years Ah slaved mah life out t git mah farm free..." His voice broke off. His lips moved as though

a thousand words were spilling silently out of his mouth, as though he did not have breath enough to give them sound. He looked to the sky, and then back to the dust. "Now, its all gone. *Gone*... Ef Ah run erway, Ah ain got nothin. Ef Ah stay n fight, Ah ain got nothin. It dont make no difference which way Ah go. Gawd! Gawd, Ah wish all them white folks wuz dead! *Dead*, Ah tell yuh! Ah wish Gawd would kill em *all!*"

She watched him run a few steps and stop. His throat swelled. He lifted his hands to his face; his fingers trembled. Then he bent to the ground and cried. She touched his shoulders.

"Silas!"

He stood up. She saw he was staring at the white man's body lying in the dust in the middle of the road. She watched him walk over to it. He began to talk to no one in particular; he simply stood over the dead white man and talked out of his life, out of a deep and final sense that now it was all over and nothing could make any difference.

"The white folks ain never gimme a chance! They ain never give no black man a chance! There ain nothin in yo whole life yuh kin keep from em! They take yo lan! They take yo freedom! They take yo women! N then they take yo life!" He turned to her, screaming. "N then Ah gits stabbed in the back by mah own blood! When mah eyes is on the white folks to keep em from killin me, mah own blood trips me up!" He knelt in the dust again and sobbed; after a bit he looked to the sky, his face wet with tears. "Ahm gonna be hard like they is! So hep me, Gawd, Ah'm gonna be *hard*! When they come fer me Ahm gonna be *here*! N when they git me outta here theys gonna know Ahm gone! Ef Gawd lets me live Ahm gonna make em *feel it!*" He stopped and tried to get his breath. "But, Lawd, Ah don wanna be this way! I don mean nothin! Yuh die ef yuh fight! Yuh die ef yuh don fight! Either way yuh die n it don mean nothin..."

He was lying flat on the ground, the side of his face deep in dust. Sarah stood nursing the baby with eyes black and stony. Silas pulled up, slowly and stood again on the porch.

"Git on t An Peels, Sarah!"

A dull roar came from the south. They both turned. A long streak of brown dust was weaving down the hillside.

"Silas!"

"Go on cross the fiels, Sarah!"

"We kin *both* go! Git the hosses!"

He pushed her off the porch, grabbed her hand, and led her to the rear of the house, past the well, to where a path led up a slope to the elm tree.

"Silas!"

"Yuh git on fo they ketch yuh too!"

Blind from tears, she went across the swaying fields, stumbling over blurred grass. It ain no use! She knew it was now too late to make him change his mind. The calves of her legs knotted. Suddenly her throat tightened, aching. She stopped, closed her eyes and tried to stem a flood of sorrow that

drenched her. Yes, killing of white men by black men and killing of black men by white men went on in spite of the hope of white bright days and the desire of dark black nights and the long gladness of green cornfields in summer and the deep dream of sleepy grey skies in winter. And when killing started it went on, like a river flowing. Oh, she felt sorry for Silas! Silas... He was following that long river of blood. Lawd, how come he wans't stay ther elike that? And he did not want to die; she knew he hated dying by the way he talked of it. Yet he followed the old river of blood, knowing that it meant nothing. He followed it, cursing and whimpering. But he followed it. She stared before her at the dry, dusty grass. Somehow, men, black men and white men, land and houses, green cornfields and grey skies, gladness and dreams, were all a part of that which made life good. Yes, somehow, they were linked, like the spokes in a spinning wheel. She felt they were. She knew they were. She felt it when she breathed and knew it when she looked. But she could not say how; she could not put her finger on it and when she thought hard about it it became all mixed up, like milk spilling suddenly. Or else it knotted in her throat and chest in a hard, aching lump, like the one she felt now. She touched her face to the baby's face and cried again.

There was a loud blare of auto horns. The growing roar made her turn round. Silas was standing, seemingly unafraid, leaning against a post of the porch. The long line of cars came speeding in clouds of dust. Silas moved toward the door and went in. Sarah ran down the slope a piece, coming again to the elm tree. Her breath was slow and hard. The cars stopped in front of the house. There was a steady drone of motors and drifting clouds of dust. For a moment she could not see what was happening. Then on all sides white men with pistols and rifles swarmed over the fields. She dropped to her knees, unable to take her eyes away, unable, it seemed, to breathe. A shot rang out. A white man fell, rolling over, face downward.

"Hes gotta gun!"

"Git back!"

"Lay down!"

The white men ran back and crouched behind cars. Three more shots came from the house. She looked, her head and eyes aching. She rested the baby in her lap and shut her eyes. Her knees sank into the dust. More shots came, but it was no use looking now. She knew it all by heart. She could feel it happening even before it happened. There were men killing and being killed. Then she jerked up, being compelled to look.

"Burn the bastard out!"

"Set the sonofabitch on fire!"

"Cook the coon!"

"Smoke im out!"

She saw two white men on all fours creeping past the well. One carried a gun and the other a red tin can. When they reached the back steps the one with the tin can crept under the house and crept out again. Then both rose and ran. Shots. One fell. A yell went up. A yellow tongue of fire licked out from under

the back steps.

"Burn the nigger!"

"C mon out, nigger, n git yos!"

She watched from the hill-slope; the back steps blazed. The white men fired a steady stream of bullets. Black smoke spiraled upward in the sunshine. Shots came from the house. The white men crouched out of sight, behind their cars.

"Make up your mind, nigger!"

"C mon out er burn, yuh black bastard!"

"Yuh think yuhre white now, nigger?"

The shack blazed, flanked on all sides by whirling smoke filled with flying sparks. She heard the distant hiss of flames. White men were crawling on their stomachs. Now and then they stopped, aimed, and fired into the bulging smoke. She looked with a tense numbness; she looked, waiting for Silas to scream, or run out. But the house crackled and blazed, spouting yellow plumes to the blue sky. The white men shot again, sending a hail of bullets into the furious pillars of smoke. And still she could not see Silas running out, or hear his voice calling. Then she jumped, standing. There was a loud crash; the roof caved in. A black chimney loomed amid crumbling wood. Flames roared and black smoke billowed, hiding the house. The white men stood up, no longer afraid. Again she waited for Silas, waited to see him fight his way out, waited to hear his call. Then she breathed a long, slow breath, emptying her lungs. She knew now. Silas had killed as many as he could and stayed on to burn, had stayed without a murmur. She filled her lungs with a quick gasp as the walls fell in; the house was hidden by eager plumes of red. She turned and ran with the baby in her arms, ran blindly across the fields, crying, "Naw, Gawd!"



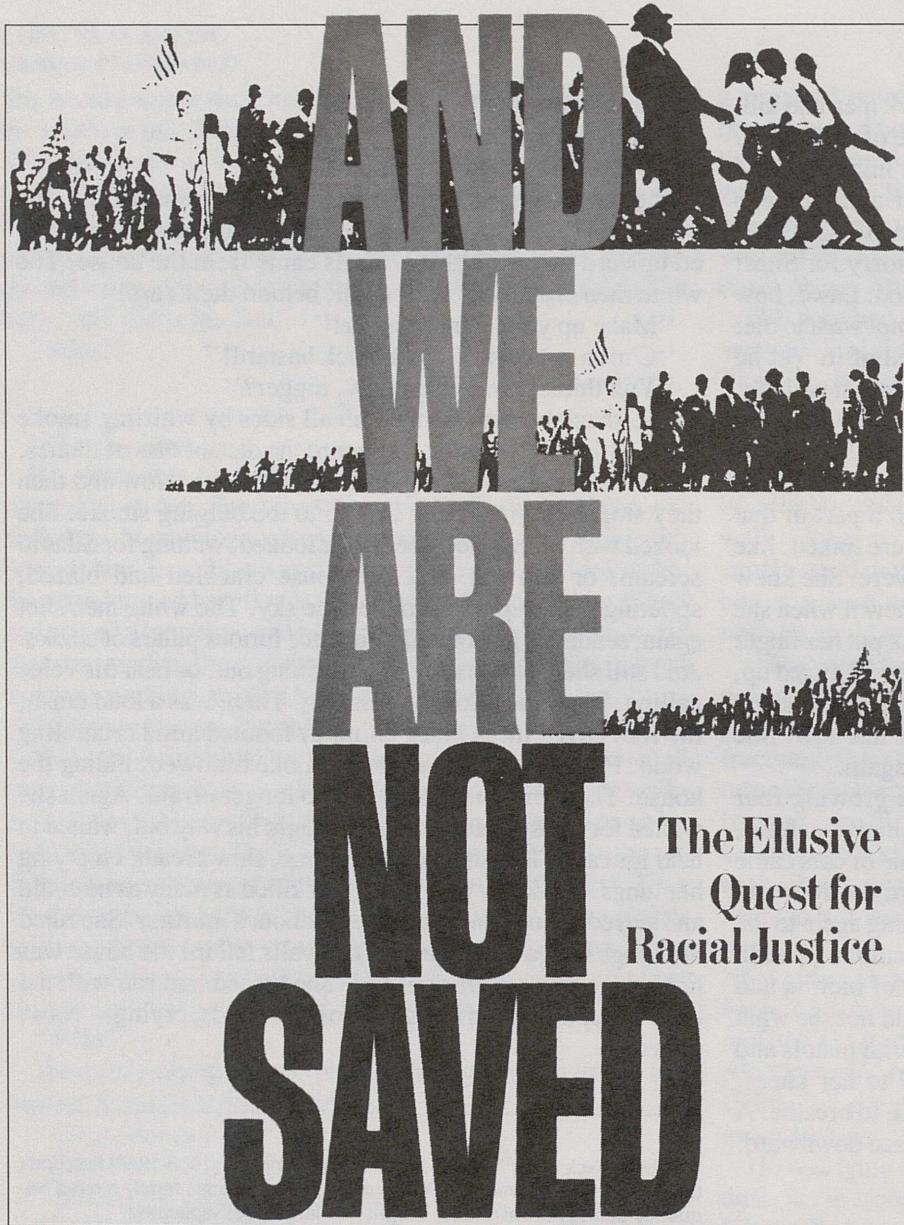
"Long Black Song" comes from Richard Wright's (1908-1960) first book titled *Uncle Tom's Children: Four Novellas*. Because his family moved frequently during his childhood, Wright was largely self-educated.

Uncle Tom's Children was published as a result of a fiction competition sponsored by *Story* magazine. The stories are actually based on the life of a Black Communist that Wright had known in Chicago. Wright joined the Communist Party in 1932 largely out of concern about racial oppression.

Although *Uncle Tom's Children* was well received, Wright later said, "I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears."

Wright's second book was published in 1940, and *Native Son* established him as one of this century's most influential writers.





The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice

Review by Michael Whitely, Pittsburgh, PA

What Happened?

In 1959, the mood among civil rights leaders and activists was so high, that the motto for that year's NAACP conference in New York was, "Free by 1963." Thirty years later Black America is still waiting. Why? What happened to the promise of justice from the early civil rights victories and the laws that followed? And what does that failure mean for Black and White America today, and in the future? In his book, "And We Are Not Saved," Harvard University law professor, Derrick Bell, uses facts, fiction, and fantasy to lead us deep into the debate; and on to his vision of an Ultimate Civil Rights Strategy.

First, Bell explains how the book developed out of an opportunity to write the forward to the 1985

Harvard Law Review US Supreme Court issue. For that occasion Bell set out to examine the civil rights movement since 1954, and the Brown-versus-the Board of Education decision that declared separate-but-equal public schools unconstitutional. "The (civil rights) movement," Bell writes, "is much more than the totality of the judicial decisions, the anti-discrimination laws, and the changes in racial relationships. The movement is a spiritual manifestation of the continuing faith of a people who have never truly gained their rights in a nation committed by its basic law to the freedom of all."

In searching for a method of expression adequate to the task, Bell decided to use "the tools not only of reason but of unreason, of fantasy." The

result is a work of fiction that attempts to shed light on the "contradictions and inconsistencies that pervade the all too real world of racial oppression."

There are two main characters in "And We Are Not Saved." He, the narrator of the story, is a black law professor at a prestigious white eastern university. She is Geneva Crenshaw, a leading black civil rights attorney during the 60's, who dropped from sight after a near fatal car crash, and has resurfaced with some mystical connections.

Derrick Bell's story begins with the Narrator, weary from his daily struggles with his white university colleagues, enroute to New York for the Black Centennial Convention, a special gathering of civil rights leaders. During the trip his mind drifts back to an extraordinary meeting just weeks before with Geneva Crenshaw, at her cottage in Virginia; their first encounter in 20 years. There, to his amazement, she recounts a series of "allegorical visions," or Chronicles, that she's had. She believes the Chronicles are trying to reveal "new truths about the dilemma of blacks in this country," and she calls on him to help her interpret them.

The first chapter is called The Real Status of Blacks Today, and it begins with, "the Chronicle of the Constitutional Contradiction." Here Geneva Crenshaw recalls a trip back in time, where she confronts the Framers of the Constitution as they argue for and against the sanctioning of slavery. Bell dramatizes the encounter, allowing the voices of the imaginary delegates to fill the hall with all of the shock and surprise they surely would feel, should a very self-possessed black woman suddenly appear to take them to task for corrupting their stated ideals of freedom and justice. Following the Chronicle, Crenshaw and the narrator discuss the implications of that original American contradiction, and its continuing impact on efforts by Black Americans to receive justice under the law today.

The next chapter is called, "The Benefits to Whites of Civil Rights Legislation," beginning with the Chronicle of the Celestial Curia. This vision finds Crenshaw in the presence of a body of robed supernatural social reform activists from all over the world, who are hard at work on humanities' many social problems. It seems Crenshaw is being recruited to work on solutions for the Race problem in America. Following this Chronicle, Crenshaw and the narrator discuss the apparent hesitancy of the U.S. Supreme Court to exercise existing powers to insure the rights of Black America in cases where there is no clear benefit to White America.

This pattern, of Chronicles followed by in-depth, fact-filled discussions, continues for the rest of the book, as the Law Professor and the Visionary explore civil rights strategy after strategy,

playing each out to its' ultimate inadequacy. For example, Chapter Three looks at black voting power and the Voting Rights Act, coming to the conclusion that even if blacks were guaranteed representation in proportion to black population that would not result in justice or equality. Chapter Four takes on school desegregation in the Chronicle of the Sacrificed School Children. Here they conclude that blacks have fared no better under desegregation, while white school systems have received the benefit of millions in federal aid. Reparations, or the idea that Black Americans should be compensated for their years of discrimination, is dissected in Chapter Five. Chapter Six examines the Unspoken Limit on Affirmative Action. Remaining Chapters explore the concept of national crisis as a means to unify the races, the combined effects of black sexism and white racism, black emigration, the self-cure of blacks pulling themselves up by their boot straps, and finally, the Black Crime Cure, leading to the Ultimate Civil Rights Strategy.

The story ends as our narrator arrives at the Black Centennial Convention, only to find the Civil Rights Chronicles and an appearance by Geneva Crenshaw and her supernatural allies, as the only item on the agenda. It ends on a high note as they embrace the wisdom of the Ultimate Strategy.

Derrick Bell states his goal up front as not offering definitive answers, but more, "as law teacher rather than social seer," provoking discussion leading to "new insights" and "more effective strategies." Given the range of the material covered and the depth of the discussions, he has achieved that goal and more.

The decision to abandon the dry jargon of legal case law, and to fashion characters that grip the mind and emotions works well. Each of the dramatic situations in the Chronicles touches a nerve, and the heated discussions that follow hold the attention as an incredible amount of real information, about real civil rights law and history, is made available. The organization of the book, with its' storyline written to leave a cliffhanger at the end of each chapter, also lends itself to easy discussion group and classroom use.

The title of the book, "And We Are Not Saved," is the end of a slightly longer biblical quotation, from Jeremiah 8:20, it reads; "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." For Derrick Bell the implications for the past civil rights movement are clear. In response, he is proposing a grander vision, that is at the same time even more basic. He writes, "The goal of a just society for all is morally correct, strategically necessary, and tactically sound." Only in this, Derrick Bell believes, will the civil rights movement find it's ultimate strategy.



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CNG—VITA AWARD



Debbie Freeman, *Shooting Star's* Director of Design, recently received the prestigious CNG-VITA Award for volunteerism. The CNG-AWARD involves a cash gift of \$250 to *Shooting Star* as well as a month dedicated to honoring the winner on radio and through the press. This 12-month program is sponsored by Consolidated Natural Gas and WQED-FM of Pittsburgh. Although there are many *Shooting Star* Volunteers who merit this recognition, Debbie received the 1989 tribute because . . .

Deborah became involved with *Shootin Star* during its developmental stages and perseveres to see that this organization becomes the best possible. In addition to meticulous design, she actively recruits others to help and promotes the magazine at public functions.

Deborah meets deadlines despite rain and snow and darkness of night. Her performance merited CNG VITA recognition because she does not have a car and must take two to three buses to reach *Shooting Star's* offices.

She is a self-directed worker, and a leader who follows graciously. Deborah's infectious humor, enthusiasm and good will creates a camaraderie that makes hard jobs easy.

Debbie works full time as Director of Production for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. In addition to her volunteerism with *Shooting Star*, Debbie is a lay speaker and Chairperson of Worship and Evangelism with the United Methodist Church of Our Saviour.

CONGRATULATIONS DEBBIE . . . AND THANK YOU!!

Shooting Star Literature Clubs

Shooting Star Literature Clubs are an exciting concept designed to bring individuals together to read and discuss African-American literature.

Literature clubs could become part of lunch hour discussion groups, happy hour awareness sessions, coffee clubs, dinner meetings and Sunday brunch get-togethers.

Social and civic organizations could establish reading clubs with a focus on mother-daughter, father-son, male-female relationships—building through literary experiences.

Shooting Star Literature Clubs can be started as an after-school activity. Children's and Teen Clubs could begin in school or public libraries.

Organizations interested in literacy can develop clubs with their members.

For more information write to:

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BLUES DREAM

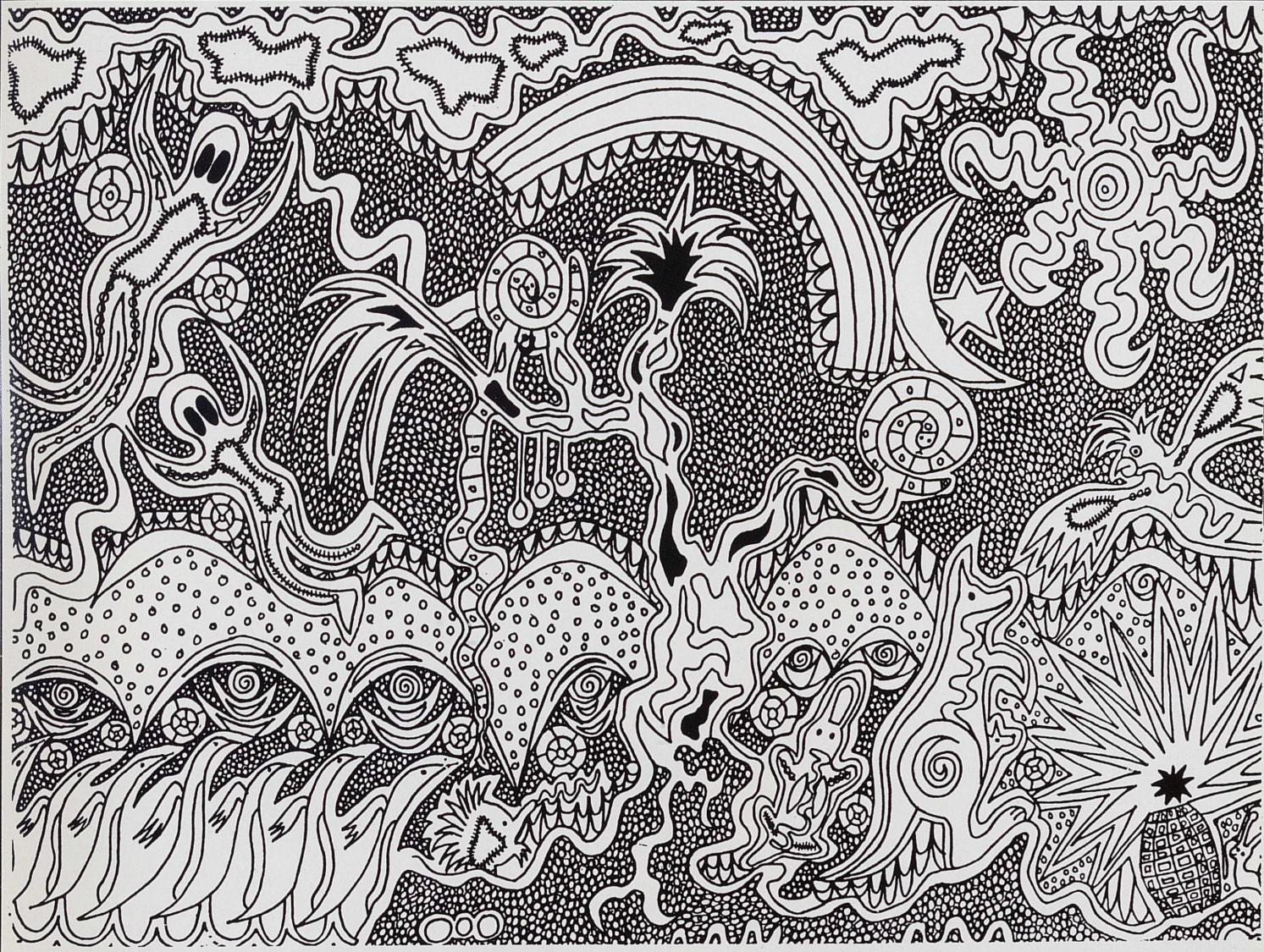


ILLUSTRATION BY C.E. HULL ENTITLED "DREAMING"
NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

*Life on the skids
in an old bar with
Victoria Spivey. She's
up there with a new Queen
of the Blues, who says she
know me, But I can't
remember.*

*Someone gives me something,
and we take in another
Black bar with statues
of Sammy, some guy I can't
figure, and Frank.
Then it's through the streets*

*where they pick you up for
just walking. You feel
guilty for being yourself.*

*I hear the police radio.
They've found a small, black
suitcase with Thelonious Monk's
name on it. Next, they're looking
for a missing person. I try to
make out the name, but when
you're
rocked, you pick up every other
word,*

*and out here, a missing person
is anyone of us.*

*I make it to an all-night movie
house
filled with God's forgotten.
"Bird" is playing, or maybe it's
"Mississippi Burning." Either
way,
it isn't the truth. The truth is in
the streets and in these seats.*

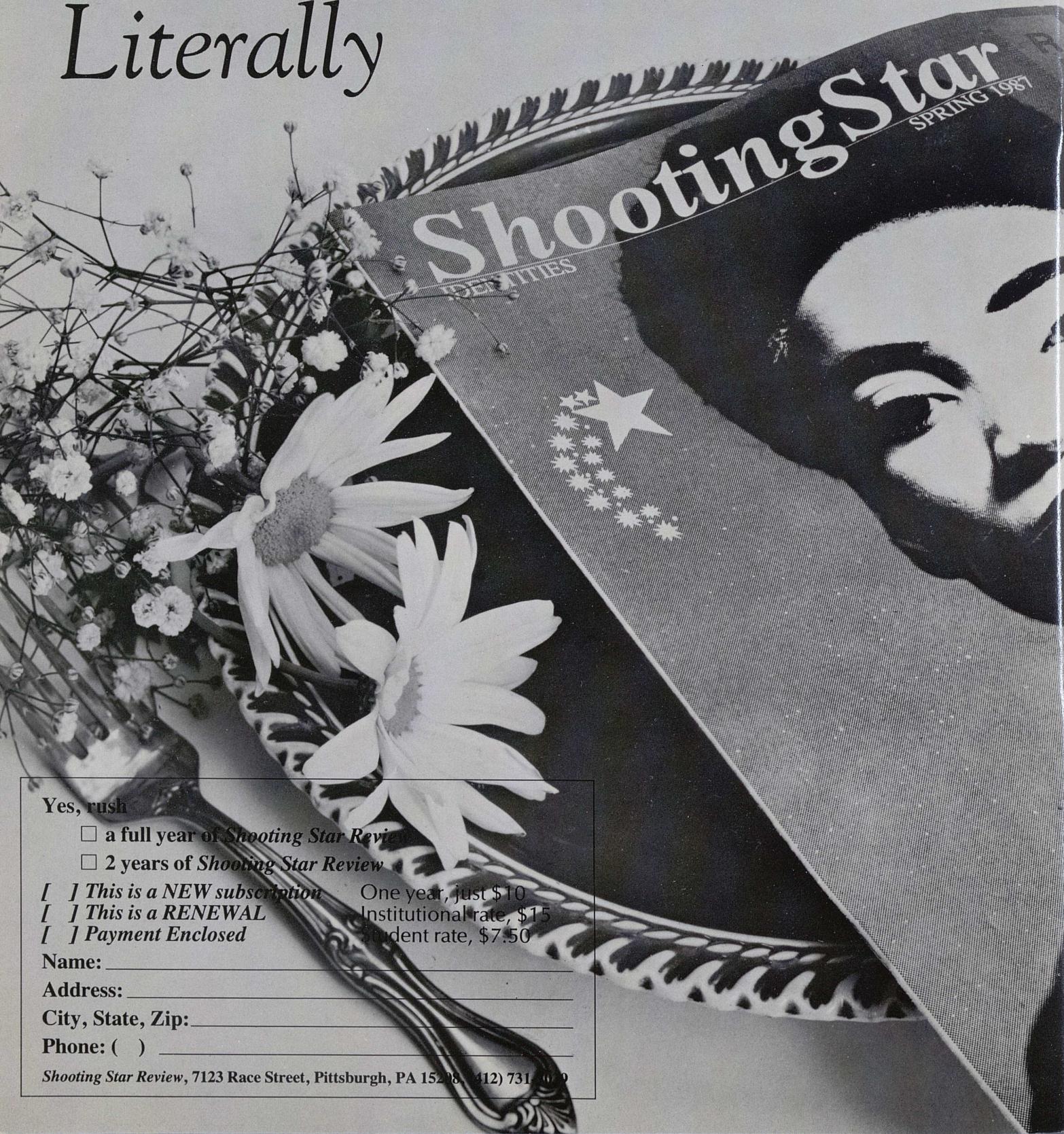
*No one gonna film this.
They steal the camera.*

*No one's gonna see this movie.
This dark Soweto in America will
not sell in the Cine in the mall.*

*We are hunched down, getting warm.
someone passes me something,
then we sit in the dark,
flickering light, no words,
no names, and we wait.*

**Franz Douskey
Mt. Carmel, CT**

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Shooting Star
REVIEW

7123 Race Street
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Shooting Star Review (Vol. 1, No. 1; Spring 1987). ISSN: 0892-1407. Editor: Sandra Gould Ford. *Shooting Star Review*, 7123 Race Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15208. Quarterly.

The *Shooting Star Review* is the latest quarterly devoted to the black literary arts. It publishes original fiction and poetry, along with essays on black culture. Rich with illustrations that evoke pride in black accomplishments, it also includes honest graphics that portray realistic views of street life. The mixture of drawings and photographs is worth noting, as they establish the feel of this publication, promoting a spirit of openness and warmth, and the sudden discoveries implied in its title. The general essays have explored gospel music, medical problems of blacks, the African origin of Egyptian civilization, and prostitution. The poems have touched on green-bean snapping and the life of black women. The reprinting of a story, "The Fall of Adam," by Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932), rescues this amusing tale from the oblivion of old anthologies. Along with book reviews, the journal includes reviews of the New York production of such as Rob Penny's review of the New York production of August Wilson's important play, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." This is a swinging communicator, infused with serious intent, a jazz note in words that should be on the current periodical shelves of all libraries that seek an investment in black creativity.

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