



# ShootingStar

Black Literary Magazine

## *Marching To A Different Beat!*

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*Shooting Star Review*  
7123 Race St.  
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*One thing they cannot prohibit-- The strong men ... coming on  
The strong men gittin stronger  
Strong men ....  
Stronger ....*

from the poem *Strong Men*

by Sterling A. Brown

# FIRST ANNUAL BLACK WRITERS CONFERENCE

Pittsburgh, PA

June 7, 8 and 9, 1991

## FRIDAY

June 7, 1991

5-8pm Registration

5-7:50 "The Best of Pittsburgh"  
Open Readings

6-7:30 Reception: Meet the  
Writers

8pm Theatre Presentation:  
Goree Revisited

11pm Hospitality Suite

For more information,  
send a self-addressed,  
stamped, business-  
size envelope to:

*Black Writers  
Conference  
c/o Shooting Star  
7123 Race Street,  
Suite 1  
Pittsburgh, PA 15208*

*This Black Writers Conference is developed by the  
Kuntu Writers Workshop and Shooting Star Produc-  
tions. The Conference is supported by grants  
from the PA Council on the Arts, The Pittsburgh  
Foundation & Three Rivers Arts Festival.*

## SATURDAY

June 8, 1991

8:30-3 Registration

9:15 Opening Blessing  
(Temujin)

9:30-11:30 August Wilson  
Symposium

Theme: "The Threats to  
Black Existence and  
How Writers Can  
Respond"

10-8 Vendors and Exhibitors

11:30-1:30 Lunch with children's  
readings

1:30-3 WORKSHOPS

A: POETRY

B: WRITING FOR  
NEWSPAPERS

3:15-4:45 WORKSHOPS

A: LITERATURE AND  
CRITICISM

B: PLAYWRITING

6pm DINNER (With Keynote  
Address)

9pm Keynote Reception

Exhibitors Hospitality Suites

## SUNDAY

June 9, 1991

8:30-12 Registration

9-10 OPEN FORUM  
w/Continental Breakfast

A. Union of Writers of African Peoples  
(UWAP) Meeting

B. How to Establish Writers  
Workshops

C. How to Establish Black  
Reading Groups

9-5 VENDORS AND  
EXHIBITORS

10-11:30 WORKSHOPS

A. FICTION & FOLKTALES

B. SMALL PRESS &  
MAGAZINES

11:30-1:30 Lunch (see lunch  
note for Saturday) and Hotel  
Check-out

1:30-3 WORKSHOPS

A. LITERATURE FOR  
CHILDREN: WRITING & STORY-  
TELLING

B. GETTING PUBLISHED

3:15 Closing Blessings

3:30 Book Signings

3:30-6 Open Readings



# ShootingStar

African American Literary Magazine

ISSN 0892-1407

REVIEW



## Marching To A Different Beat!

Winter, 1990  
Volume 4, Number 4

\$3



*I'm a-Going to Eat at...*

Heavy gospel feel, medium tempo

*Wade in the Water*

Bright tempo, with rhythmic patterns

*Refrain He's g...*

*Behold That Star*

*Ent of Mine*

Sheet music for three songs, each with lyrics and chords (e.g., G, D7, Em, Am7, Bm, C, D/A, G/A, D7, G7). The music is arranged on multiple staves.

*Wade in the Water*

Bright tempo, with rhythmic patterns

*Refrain He's g...*

Sheet music for "Wade in the Water" with lyrics and chords (e.g., A7sus, Dm7, Dm, Dm, G7, Bmaj7, G7).



# Heritage

*My grandfather was deacon  
of the local Baptist church  
where they taught an over abundance  
of fire and brimstone  
and never wearied of their obligations.  
He practiced his calling seven days a week,  
our house was a pulpit  
and our lives were like an empty vessel  
into which he poured the word of God.  
My grandmother was Cherokee  
she had high cheekbones  
and her nostrils flared  
whenever she was angry.  
She hummed church songs  
took in wash and cleaned other folks' houses.  
Unlike her husband she prayed privately  
and always found some excuse  
for not attending Sunday services.*

John G. Hall

Norton, VA

*ythmic energy*

*the Verse whole wind and the little bitty you and me.*

*much emotion (♩ = 92)*

Sheet music for 'He's Got the Whole World in His Hands.' The lyrics are written above the notes. The tempo is marked as 'much emotion' with a quarter note equal to 92. The key signature is E major (no sharps or flats).

I Stood on the River of Jordan

*light tempo, with energy*

*O when the sun goes down,*

*the saints un - der - stand,*

*go - march - ing, in - shine,*

*re - fuse to have dis - ap - peared,*

*Him Lord of lords,*

*O when the sun goes down,*

*O when the sun goes down,*

*O when they saints stars go re have Him*

Sheet music for 'O When the Saints Go Marching In.' The lyrics are written above the notes. The tempo is marked as 'light tempo, with energy'. The key signature is F major (no sharps or flats).



## Miss Perry



**We're crossing over one by one**

**We're fast approaching life's setting sun**

**Don't let him catch you with your work undone**

**We're crossing over one by one**

Miss Perry would rock back an forth  
justa swinging that funeral parlor fan  
hummin' throat deep gospel tunes  
noddin' between Amens

Spirit hit Miss Perry

creepin' thick and steady beneath  
beige stockings knotted at the knees

Spirit be weaving Miss Perry through  
"yes Lawds" and "thank you Jesuses"  
while she testifies toe-tapping testimonials

Miss Perry said the devil  
in the form of a snake, appeared  
at the foot of her bed one Sunday morning  
hissin' through clenched fangs/spewing fire  
Step back devil, step back

She flings Bible verses like sharpened  
daggers

Step back devil, step back

She cradles crucifixes like little lost children

**Step back devil, step back**

**HALLELUJAH HALLELUJAH HALLELUJAH**

**Through dancing hands and stomping feet**

**HALLELUJAH HALLELUJAH HALLELUJAH**

**Through tightened eyes and wailful cries**

Amen sister, Amen

Miss Perry said that the snake  
vanished in the smoke of dawn

Should have known better

That silly ole snake

Than to mess with no Baptist

Especially on Sunday morning

Especially with Miss Perry

**We're crossing over one by one**

**We're fast approaching life's setting sun**

**Don't let him catch you with your work undone**

**We're crossing over one by one**

*bold verses are to be sung*

Sharon Leonard Goodman

Philadelphia, PA



# FOUNDER'S STATEMENT



"Marching to a Different Beat" is inspired by those personal heroisms that sparkle in our lives. Those shining moments that occur when we stand up for a belief ... when we reach for a dream that others don't understand ... when we step away from situations that others embrace.

We may not make the news like a Medgar Evers, a Nelson Mandela or a Malcolm X. We may not find ourselves widely celebrated like Lena Horne, Booker T. Washington and Fannie Lou Hamer. We may not gain acclaim like Frederick Douglas, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. The important thing is that we allow ourselves and others the opportunity, the adventure ... the challenge.

So, for the sung and the unsung heroes and sheroes, for those moments when we, ourselves, take a chance and walk in a slightly different sunshine and rain, this "Marching to a Different Beat" issue is dedicated to you ... to us.

*Sandra Gould Ford*

Publisher

## MISSION STATEMENT

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

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ISSN 0892-1407

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#### **SUBMISSION POLICY**

FREE Submission Guidelines with helpful information, including upcoming themes and maximum word counts available with SASE. All submissions must include a self-addressed envelope with sufficient return postage.

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

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

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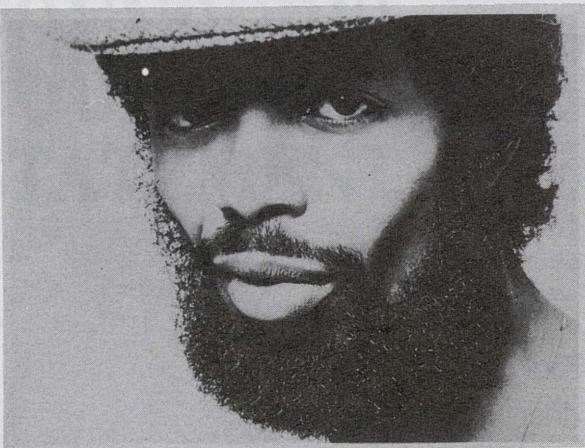
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## **COVER**

The cover features Misses Lockhart, Battle, Ross and Stubbs, four members of the George Westinghouse High School band from Pittsburgh, PA. These young women demonstrated a pride in themselves and their talents. They exemplified the progressive spirit and internal strength that will be so important in building satisfying and productive lives. The Westinghouse High School Band is an 80-member, award-winning marching unit that is headed by Calvin M. Stemley. The band has developed quite a following for its unique marching style best known for integrating spirited dance routines while performing.

Photography by Sandra Gould Ford.



Gil Scott-Heron

### SO FAR, SO GOOD

by Gil Scott-Heron

*Third World Press*

ISBN 0-88378-1336

New collection of song-poems by "Bluesologist" Gil Scott-Heron, America's conscious for the past 20 years.

### BREAKING THE CHAINS

by William Loren Katz

*Atheneum*

ISBN 0-689-31493-0 \$14.95

An easy-to-read, generously illustrated book that uses accounts and narratives of Black people to dispel the myth of the docile slave who quietly accepted bondage.

### RAIN TALK

by Mary Serfozo

Illustrated by Keiko Narashahi

*Margaret K. Elderry Books*

ISBN 0-689-50496-9 \$12.95

For ages 4-8

A warmly illustrated (watercolor) and pleasant 32-page story of a Black girl's enjoyment of walking in the rain.

### LOVERS' CHOICE

by Becky Birtha

*The Seal Press*

ISBN 0-931188-56-3  
\$8.95

The second volume of short fiction from a thoughtful and eloquent writer.

### SORROW'S KITCHEN, THE LIFE AND FOLK-LORE OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON

by Mary E. Lyons

*Charles Scribner's Sons*

ISBN 0-684-19198-9 \$13.95

For ages 12 and up

A lovingly compiled biography and reference book--including photos--on the life of this important writer and anthropologist.

### DECOLONIZING THE MIND: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

by Ngugi wa Thiong'o

*Educational Books, Inc.*

ISBN 0-85255-501-6

The author's dedication reads: "This book is gratefully dedicated to all those who write in

Cornelius Eady leads and then cuts a line like no one else: following the laughter and the compassionate pith of a dauntless imagination, these poems beeline or zig-zag always to the jugular, the dramatic and arguable revelation of the heart. What a dazzling gift of new poetry.

### A WALK IN THE NIGHT AND OTHER STORIES

by Alex La Guma

*Northwestern University Press*

ISBN 0-8101-0139-4

First published in 1962, this collection, "shows, in the starker terms, the plight of the non-white in South Africa today."

Slave testimony reveals a heritage of rebelliousness stretching from the kidnappings in Africa to the end of the Civil War, and this American story adds a proud new dimension to the world struggle for freedom. Africans demonstrated endurance, resilience, and bravery in the face of the most wretched conditions in the New World. They were among the first Americans to die for the great ideal that all are created free and equal.

### Breaking the Chains.

African languages, and to all those who over the years have maintained the dignity of the literature, culture, philosophy, and other treasures carried by African languages.'

### ROSA PARKS, MOVE TO THE FRONT

#### OF THE BUS

by Kai Friese

*Silver Burdett Press*

Age 10 and up

ISBN 0-382-24065-0 \$7.95

The story of a Black "troublemaker" who was put off a Montgomery bus in 1943 for using the front door and 12 years later refused to give her seat to a white man. One of a nine-volume set on milestones in THE HISTORY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

# Loosening Strings or Give Me an 'A'

yes i listened to Country Joe & the Fish

    yes i howled with Steppenwolf

yes Fleetwood Mac was my epiphany

    & Creedence Clearwater Revival

swept me neath the waters Hendrix

my national anthem always yes

    Blind Lemon Jefferson & B.B. huddle

by my stage door yes Chuck Berry lives

next to me yes

Eric Clapton made me wanna have

    a child named Laela yes

Sonny Sharrock drew screams outta me

    Linda can't eclipse

yes i remember My Lai & the Audubob  
debacle

yes Hamza- el- Din is a caracole out my  
mouth

yes i never forgot where i came from &  
nobody misses me cuz

    i never left

in search of a portrait

    of an artist

    as a yng man

yes i read ULYSSES & he came home

    yes oh yes

    i know my Joyce

i cd tell niggah chords meant for me

yes "I searching...I'm searchin" my Olympics  
say

Circe, the Scylla the Charybdis,

    any Siren and all the Pentagon

yes Circe, the Scylla, the Charybdis

    any Siren and alla the Pentagon

aint kept yes i say aint kept

this one yes niggah man from yes

    makin art outta me

yes

    "i'm gonna love him all over all over  
        & over"

cuz niggahs aint in search of

we just get discovered

so yes

    i must be the New World now yes

i'm in tune

oh yes play me

    pick my colored tones

yes strum my niggah chords

    find my sharps & flats

let em have space

oh yes oh yes i know my Joyce  
& Ulysses he done come home

yes play me now

yes make me alla that

yes i'll be the bottom or i cd just ride

yes i know my Joyce & all you gotta say  
    is "Give me an 'A'"

    Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

yes Ulysses he done come home

yes i must be the New World

yes Ulysses he done come home

yes i must be the New World

yes i'm in tune

just yes oh yes just play me

baby play me

yes

Ntozake Shange

Philadelphia, PA

# THE SCAPEGOAT



Photo (c) 1990 by Sandra Gould Ford

by Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906)

**The law is usually supposed to be a stern mistress, not to be lightly wooed, and yielding only to the most ardent pursuit. But even law, like love, sits more easily on some natures than on others.**

This was the case with Mr. Robinson Asbury. Mr. Asbury had started life as a bootblack in the growing town of Cadgers. From this he had risen one step and become porter and messenger in a barber shop. This rise fired his ambition, and he was not content until he had learned to use the shears and the razor and had a chair of his own. From this, in a man of Robinson's temperament, it was only a step to a shop of his own, and he placed it where it would do the most good.

Fully one-half of the population of Cadgers was composed of Negroes, and with their usual tendency to colonize, a tendency encouraged, and in fact compelled, by circumstances, they had gathered into one part of the town. Here in alleys, and streets as dirty and hardly wider, they thronged like ants.

It was in this place that Mr. Asbury set up his shop, and he won the hearts of his prospective customers by putting up the significant sign, "Equal Rights

Barbershop." This legend was quite unnecessary, because there was only one race about, to patronize the place. But it was a delicate sop to the people's vanity, and it served its purpose.

Asbury came to be known as a clever fellow, and his business grew. The shop really became a sort of club and, on Saturday nights especially, was the gathering-place of the men of the whole Negro quarter.

He kept the illustrated and race journals there, and those who cared neither to talk nor listen to someone else might see pictured the doings of high society in very short skirts or read in the Negro papers how Miss Boston had entertained Miss Blueford to tea on such and such an afternoon. Also, he kept the policy returns, which was wise, if not moral.

It was his wisdom rather more than his morality that made the party managers after a while cast their glances towards him as a man who might be useful to their interests. It would be well to have a man - a shrewd, and powerful man - down in that part of the town who could carry his people's vote in his vest pocket, and who at any time its delivery might be needed, could hand it over without hesitation. Asbury seemed that man, and they settled upon him. They gave him money, and they gave him power and patronage. He took it all silently and he carried out his bargain faithfully. His hands and his lips alike closed tightly when there was anything within them. It was not long before he found himself the big Negro of the district and, of necessity, of the town. The time came when, at a critical moment, the managers saw that they had not reckoned without their host in choosing this barber of the black district as the leader of his people.

Now, so much success must have satisfied any other man. But in many ways Mr. Asbury was unique. For a long time he himself had done very little shaving - except of notes, to keep his hand in. His time had been otherwise employed. In the evening hours he had been wooing the coquettish Dame Law, and wonderful to say, she yielded easily to his advances.

It was against the advice of his friends that he asked

for admission to the bar. They felt that he could do more good in the place where he was.

"You see, Robinson," said old Judge Davis, "it's just like this: If you're not admitted, it'll hurt you with the people; if you are admitted, you'll move uptown to an office and get out of touch with them."

Asbury smiled an inscrutable smile. Then he whispered something into the judge's ear that made the old man wrinkle from his neck up with appreciative smiles.

"Asbury," he said, "you are - you are - well, you ought to be white, that's all. When we find a black man like you we send him to State's prison. If you were white, you'd go to the Senate."

you ought to be white, that's all. When we find a black man like you we send him to State's prison. If you were white, you'd go to the Senate."

The Negro laughed confidently.

He was admitted to the bar soon after, whether by merit or by connivance is not to be told.

"Now he will move uptown," said the black community. "Well that's the way with a colored man when he gets a start."

But they did not know Robinson Asbury yet. He was a man of surprises, and they were destined to disappointment. He did not move uptown. He built an office in a small open space next to his shop, and there he hung out his shingle.

"I will never desert the people who have done so much to elevate me," said Mr. Asbury. "I will live among them and I will die among them."

This was a strong card for the barber-lawyer. The people seized upon the statement as expressing a nobility of an altogether unique brand.

They held a mass meeting and endorsed him. They made resolutions that extolled him, and the Negro band came around and serenaded him, playing various things in varied time.

All this was very sweet to Mr. Asbury, and the party managers chuckled with satisfaction and said, "That Asbury, that Asbury!"

Now there is a fable extant of a man who tried to please everybody, and his failure is matter of record. Robinson Asbury was not more successful. But be it said that his ill success was due to no fault or shortcoming of his.

For a long time his growing power had been looked upon with disfavor by the colored law firm of Bingo & Latchett. Both Mr. Bingo and Mr. Latchett themselves aspired to be Negro leaders in Cadgers, and they were delivering Emancipation Day orations and riding at the head of processions when Mr. Asbury was blacking boots. Is it any wonder, then, that they viewed with alarm his sudden rise? They kept their counsel, however, and treated with him, for it was best. They

allowed him his scope without open revolt until the day upon which he hung out his shingle. This was the last straw. They could stand no more. Asbury had stolen their other chances from them, and now he was poaching upon the last of their preserves. So Mr. Bingo and Mr. Latchett put their heads together to plan the downfall of their common enemy.

The plot was deep and embraced the formation of an opposing faction made up of the best Negroes of the town. It would have looked too much like what it was for the gentlemen to show themselves in the matter, and so they took into their confidence Mr. Isaac Morton, the principal of the colored school, and it was under his ostensible leadership that the new faction finally came into being.

Mr. Morton was really an innocent young man, and he had ideals which should never have been exposed to the air. When the wily confederates came to him with their plan he believed that his worth had been recognized, and at last he was to be what nature destined him for - a leader.

The better class of Negroes - by that is meant those who were particularly envious of Asbury's success - flocked to the new man's standard. But whether the race be white or black, political virtue is always in a minority, so Asbury could afford to smile at the force

arrayed against him.

The new faction met together and resolved. They resolved among other things, that Mr. Asbury was an enemy to his race and a menace to civilization. They decided that he should be abolished; but they couldn't get out an injunction against him, and as he had the whole undignified but still voting black belt behind him, he went serenely on his way.

"They're after you hot and heavy, Asbury," said one of his friends to him.

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "they're after me, but after a while I'll get so far away that they'll be running in front."

"Yes. Well, it's good to be one of the best people, but your vote only counts one just the same."

The time came, however, when Mr. Asbury's theory was put to the test. The Cadgerites celebrated the first of January as Emancipation Day. On this day there was a large

procession, with speechmaking in the afternoon and fireworks at night. It was the custom to concede the leadership of the colored people of the town to the man who managed to lead the procession. For two years past this honor had fallen, of course, to Robinson Asbury, and there had been no disposition on the part of anybody to try conclusions with him.

Mr. Morton's faction changed all this. When Asbury went to work to solicit contributions for the celebration, he suddenly became aware that he had a fight upon his hands. All the better-class Negroes were staying out of it. The next thing he knew was that plans were on foot for a rival demonstration.

"Oh," he said to himself, "that's it, is it? Well, if they want a fight they can have it."

He had a talk with the party managers, and he had another with Judge Davis.

"All I want is a little lift, Judge," he said, "and I'll make 'em think the sky has turned loose and is vomiting

niggers."

The judge believed that he could do it. So did the party managers. Asbury got his lift. Emancipation Day came.

There were two parades. At least, there was one parade and the shadow of another. Asbury's, however, was not the shadow. There was a great deal of substance about it - substance made up of many people, many banners, and numerous bands. He did not have the best people. Indeed among his cohorts there were a good many of the pronounced ragtag and bobtail. But he had noise and numbers. In such cases, nothing more is needed. The success of Asbury's side of the affair did everything to confirm his friends in their good opinion of him.

When he found himself defeated, Mr. Silas Bingo saw that it would be policy to placate his rival's just anger against him. He called upon him at his office the day after the celebration.

"Well, Asbury," he said, "you beat us, didn't you?"

"It wasn't a question of beating," said the other calmly. "It was only an inquiry as to who were the people - the few or the many."

"Well, it was well done, and you've shown that you are a manager. I confess that I haven't always thought that you were doing the wisest thing in living down here and catering to this class of people when you might, with your ability, be much more to the better class."

"What do they base their claims of being better on?"  
"Oh, there ain't any use discussing that. We can't get along without you, we see that. So I, for one, have decided to work with you for harmony."

"Harmony. Yes that's what we want."

"If I can do anything to help you at any time, why you have only to command me."

"I am glad to find such a friend in you. Be sure, if I ever need you, Bingo, I'll call on you."

"And I'll be ready to serve you."

Asbury smiled when his visitor was gone. He smiled, and knitted his brow. "I wonder what Bingo's got up his sleeve," he said. "He'll bear watching."

It may have been pride at his triumph, it may have been gratitude at his helpers, but Asbury went into the ensuing campaign with reckless enthusiasm. He did the most daring things for the party's sake. Bingo, true to his promise, was ever at his side ready to serve him. Finally, association and immunity made danger less fearsome; the rival no longer appeared a menace.

With the generosity born of obstacles overcome, Asbury determined to forgive Bingo and give him a chance. He let him in on a deal, and from that time they worked amicably together until the election came and passed.

It was a close election and many things had had to be done, but there were men there ready and waiting to do them. They were successful, and then the first cry of the defeated party was, as usual, "Fraud! Fraud!" The cry was taken up by the jealous, the disgruntled, and the virtuous.

Someone remembered how two years ago the registration books had been stolen. It was known upon good authority that money had been freely used. Men held up their hands in horror at the suggestion that the Negro vote had been juggled with, as if that were a new thing. From their pulpits ministers denounced the machine and bade their hearers rise and throw off the yoke of a corrupt municipal government. One of those sudden fevers of reform had taken possession of the town and threatened to destroy the successful party.

They began to look around them. They must purify themselves. They must give the people some tangible evidence of their own yearnings after purity. They looked around them for a sacrifice to lay upon the altar of municipal reform. Their eyes fell upon Mr. Bingo. No, he was not big enough. His blood was too scant to wash the political stains. Then they looked into each other's eyes and turned their gaze away to let it fall upon Mr. Asbury. They really hated to do it. But there must be a scapegoat. The god from the Machine commanded them to slay him.

Robinson Asbury was charged with many crimes -

with all that he had committed and some he had not. When Mr. Bingo saw what was afoot he threw himself heart and soul into the work of his old rival's enemies. He was of incalculable use to them.

Judge Davis refused to have anything to do with the matter. But in spite of his disapproval it went on. Asbury was indicted and tried. The evidence was all against him, and no one gave more damaging testimony than his friend Mr. Bingo. The judge's charge was favorable to the defendant, but the current of popular opinion could not be entirely stemmed. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty.

"Before I am sentenced, Judge, I have a statement to make to the court. It will take less than ten minutes."

"Go on, Robinson," said the judge kindly.

Asbury started, in a monotonous tone, a recital that brought the prosecuting attorney to his feet in a minute. The judge waved him down, and sat transfixed by a sort of fascinated horror as the convicted man went on. The before-mentioned attorney drew a knife and started for the prisoner's dock. With difficulty he was restrained. A dozen faces in the courtroom were red and pale by turns.

"He ought to be killed," whispered Mr. Bingo audibly.

Robinson Asbury looked at him and smiled, and then he told a few things of him. He gave the ins and outs of some of the misdemeanors of which he stood accused. He showed who were the men behind the throne. And still, pale and transfixed, Judge Davis waited for his own sentence.

Never were ten minutes so well taken up. It was a tale of rottenness and corruption in high places told simply and with the stamp of truth upon it.

He did not mention the judge's name. But he had torn the mask from the face of every other man who had been concerned in his downfall. They had shorn him of his strength, but they had forgotten that he was yet able to bring the roof and pillars tumbling about their heads.

The judge's voice shook as he pronounced sentence upon his old ally - a year in State's prison.

Some people said it was too light, but the judge knew what it was to wait for the sentence of doom, and he was grateful and sympathetic.

When the sheriff led Asbury away the judge hastened

to have a short talk with him.

"I'm sorry, Robinson," he said, "and I want to tell you that you were no more guilty than the rest of us. But why did you spare me?"

"Because I knew you were my friend," answered the convict.

"I tried to be, but you were the first man that I've ever known since I've been in politics who ever gave me any decent return for friendship."

"I reckon you're about right, Judge."

In politics, party reform usually lies in making a scapegoat of someone who is only as criminal as the rest, but a little weaker. Asbury's friends and enemies had succeeded in making him bear the burden of all the party's crimes, but their reform was hardly a success, and their protestations of change of heart were received with doubt. Already there were those who began to pity the victim and to say that he had been hardly dealt with.

Mr. Bingo was not of these; but he found, strange to say, that his opposition to the idea went but a little way, and that even with Asbury out of his path he was a smaller man than he was before. Fate was strong against him. His poor, prosperous humanity could not enter the lists against a martyr. Robinson Asbury was now a martyr.

## II

**A year is not a long time. It was short enough to prevent people from forgetting Robinson, and yet long enough for their pity to grow strong as they remembered**

Indeed, he was not gone a year. Good behavior cut two months off the time of his sentence, and by the time people had come around to notion that he was really the greatest and smartest man in Cadgers he was at home again.

He came back with no flourish of trumpets, but quietly, humbly. He went back again into the heart of the black district. His business had deteriorated during his absence, but he put new blood and new life into it. He did not go to work in the shop himself

but, taking down the shingle that had swung idly before his office during his imprisonment, he opened the little room as a news and cigar stand.

Here anxious, pitying customers came to him and he prospered again. He was very quiet. Uptown hardly knew that he was again in Cadgers, and it knew nothing whatever of his doings.

"I wonder why Asbury is so quiet," they said to one another, "It isn't like him to be quiet." And they felt vaguely uneasy about him.

So many people had begun to say, "Well, he was a mighty good fellow after all."

Mr. Bingo expressed the opinion that Asbury was quiet because he was crushed, but others expressed doubt as to this. There are calms and calms, some after and some before the storm. Which was this?

They waited a while, and as no storm came, concluded that this must be the afterquiet. Bingo, reassured, volunteered to go and seek confirmation of this conclusion.

He went, and Asbury received him with an indifferent, not to say impolite, demeanor.

"Well, we're glad to see you back, Asbury," said Bingo patronizingly. He had variously demonstrated his inability to lead during his rival's absence and was proud of it. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to work."

"That's right, I reckon you'll stay out of politics."

"What could I do even if I went in?"

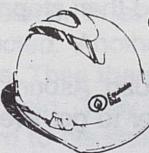
"Nothing now, of course; but I didn't know -"

He did not see the gleam in Asbury's half-shut eyes. He only marked his humility, and he went back swelling with the news.

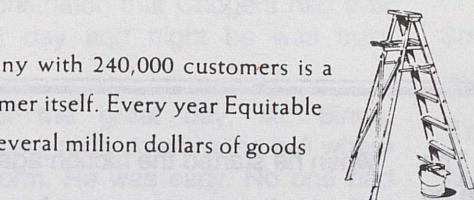
"Completely crushed - all the run taken out of him," was his report. →

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The black district believed this, too, and a sullen smouldering anger took possession of them. Here was a good man ruined. Some of the people whom he had helped in his former days - some of the rude, coarse people of the low quarter who were still sufficiently unenlightened to be grateful - talked among themselves and offered to get up a demonstration for him. But he denied them. No, he wanted nothing of the kind. It would only bring him into unfavorable notice. All he wanted was that they would always be his friends and would stick by him.

They would to the death.

There were again two factions in Cadgers. The schoolmaster could not forget how once on a time he had been made a tool of by Mr. Bingo. So he revolted against his rule and set himself up as the leader of an opposing clique. The fight had been long and strong, but had ended with odds slightly in Bingo's favor.

But Mr. Morton did not despair. As the first of January and Emancipation Day approached, he arrayed his hosts, and the fight for supremacy became fiercer than ever. The schoolteacher brought the schoolchildren in for chorus singing, secured an able orator, and the best essayist in town. With all this, he was formidable.

Mr. Bingo knew that he had the fight of his life on his hands, and he entered with fear as well as zest. He, too, found an orator, but he was not sure that he was good as Morton's. There was no doubt but that his essayist was not. He secured a band, but still he felt unsatisfied. He had hardly done enough, and for the schoolmaster to beat him now meant his political destruction.

It was in this state of mind that he was surprised to receive a visit from Mr. Asbury.

"I reckon you're surprised to see me here," said Asbury, smiling.

"I am pleased, I know." Bingo was astute.

"Well, I just dropped in on our business."

"To be sure, to be sure, Asbury. What can I do for you?"

"It's more what I can do for you that I came to talk about," was the reply.

"I don't believe I understand you."

"Well, it's plain enough, They say that the schoolteacher is giving you a pretty hard fight."

"Oh, not so hard."

"No man can be too sure of winning though. Mr. Morton once did me a mean turn

when he started the faction against me."

Bingo's heart gave a great leap, and then stopped for the fraction of a second.

"You were in it, of course," pursued Asbury, "But I can look over your part in it in order to get even with the man who started it."

It was true, then, thought Bingo gladly. He did not know. He wanted revenge for his wrongs and upon the wrong man. How well the schemer had covered his tracks! Asbury should have his revenge and Morton would be the sufferer.

"Of course, Asbury, you know that I did what I did innocently."

"Oh, yes, in politics we are all lambs and the wolves are only to be found in the other party. We'll pass that, though. What I want to say is that I can help you to make your celebration an overwhelming success. I still have some influence down in my district."

"Certainly, and very justly, too. Why I should be delighted with your aid. I could give you a prominent position in the procession."

"I don't want it; I don't want to appear in this at all. All I want is revenge. You can have all the credit, but let me down my enemy."

Bingo was perfectly willing, and with their heads close together, they had a long and close consultation. When Asbury was gone, Mr. Bingo lay back in his chair and laughed. "I'm a slick duck," he said.

From that hour Mr. Bingo's cause began to take the appearance of something very like a boom. More bands were hired. The interior of the State was called upon and a more eloquent orator secured. The crowd hastened to array itself on the growing side.

With surprised eyes, the schoolmaster beheld the wonder of it, but he kept to his own purpose with dogged insistence, even when he saw that he could not turn aside the overwhelming defeat that threatened him. But in spite of his obstinacy, his hours were dark and bitter. Asbury worked like a mole, all underground, but he was indefatigable. Two days before the celebration time everything was perfected for the biggest demonstration that Cadgers had ever known. All the next day and night he was busy among his allies.

On the morning of the great day, Mr. Bingo, wonderfully caparisoned, rode down to the hall where the parade was to form. He was early. No one had yet come. In an hour a score of men all told had collected. Another hour passed, and no more had come. Then there was smote upon his ear the sound of music. They were coming at last. Bringing his sword to his shoulder, he rode forward to the middle of the street. Ah, there they were. But - but - could he believe his eyes? They were going in another direction, and at their head rode -- Morton! He gnashed his teeth in fury. He had been led into a trap and betrayed. The procession passing had been his -- all his. He heard them cheering, and then, oh! climax of infidelity, he saw his own orator go past in a carriage, bowing and smiling to the crowd.

There was no doubting who had done this thing. The hand of Asbury was apparent in it. He must have known the truth all along, thought Bingo. His allies left him one by one for the other hall, and he rode home in a humiliation deeper than he had ever known before.

Asbury did not appear at the celebration. He was at his little newsstand all day.

In a day or two the defeated aspirant had further cause to curse his false friend. He found that not only had the people defected from him, but that the thing had been so adroitly managed that he appeared to

be in fault, and three-fourths of those who knew him were angry at some supposed grievance. His cup of bitterness was full when his partner, a quietly ambitious man, suggested that they dissolve their relations.

His ruin was complete.

The lawyer was not alone in seeing Asbury's hand in his downfall. The party managers saw it too, and they met together to discuss the dangerous factor which, while it appeared to slumber, was so terribly awake. They decided that he must be appeased, and they visited him.

He was still busy at his newsstand. They talked to him adroitly, while he sorted papers and kept an impassive face. When they were all done, he looked up for a moment and replied, "You know, gentlemen, as an ex-convict I am not in politics."

Some of them had the grace to flush.

"But you can use your influence," they said.

"I am not in politics," was his only reply.

And the spring elections were coming on. Well, they worked hard, and he showed no sign. He treated with neither one party nor the other. "Perhaps," thought the managers, "he is out of politics," and they grew more confident.

It was nearing eleven o'clock on the morning of election when a cloud no bigger than a man's hand appeared upon the horizon. It came from the direction of the black district. It grew, and the managers of the party in power looked at it, fascinated by an ominous dread. Finally it began to rain Negro voters, and as one man they voted, against their former candidates. Their organization was perfect. They simply came, voted, and left, but they overwhelmed everything. Not one of the party that had damned Robinson Asbury left in power save old Judge Davis. His majority was overwhelming.

The generalship that had engineered the thing was perfect. There were loud threats against the news-dealer. But no one bothered him except a reporter. The reporter called to see just how it was done. He found Asbury very busy sorting papers. To the newspaperman's questions he had only this reply, "I am not in politics, sir."

But Cadgers had learned its lesson.



# HIDING



Photo (c) 1990 by Manchester Craftsmen's Guild

by

Alyce Miller

**We were clear over in the vacant lot, but I swear, even from there, we could hear her thick-soled black shoes scraping in the dust. As usual, she was humming through her gums and pounding the ground with a walking stick.**

**“Hamp!” she shouted every few feet. “Hamp!”**

I had Hamp in a headlock and was dragging him over to the old schoolhouse. Lonnie and June Bug were running beside us laughing.

"Hide me, hide me," Hamp hissed into my side.

"Hamp?" her voice was sharper, angrier. "Come here, boy!"

The four of us, sweaty and overheated, crouched on the floor of the old schoolhouse. I was still holding onto Hamp's head and breathing hard. Sun shot like fire through the window and struck the dust balls roiling like tumble weeds into the corners.

"Shit, shit, shit," Hamp moaned, pushing me away.

"Shut up," I hissed, and rose up just far enough to peep out.

Coming across the vacant lot was Hamp's grandma, Miz Emily Overtucker Sealand Sparks. Despite the heat, she was dressed in all black: a long-sleeved blouse and two cotton skirts, one over the other. Like a lot of old country women from the south, she rolled her stockings down to her fleshy knees. On her head, standing guard against the sun, perched a battered straw gardening hat. From under the brim you could see the twisted ends of the green rag she'd wrapped around her head to catch the sweat.

"Boy, I know you're hidin' from me!" she wheezed. Her stick tapped, tapped, tapped on the ground.

Hamp slumped against the wall of the old schoolhouse and crossed himself three times, even though he wasn't Catholic.

Miz sparks slashed at the weeds in the vacant lot with her stick, taking out her frustration on the dandelion heads.

Ever since Hamp's mother ran off when Hamp was one year old, Miz Sparks had raised him as her son. She was strict and merciless; her beatings were legendary. Even though Hamp was big

enough now to fight back, he never did. When asked why, he shrugged and grinned. He seemed to accept the beating as some kind of duty she had toward him.

It had been terrible when he was a little boy. We used to hear him screaming bloody murder from their porch as she whipped him for sitting on the

wood shed or forgetting to sweep the floor. Everyone in the neighborhood said it was a shame. Behind Miz Sparks' back, they predicted bad things would come to the boy whose grandmother beat him like that.

Out on the street, Hamp was a good fighter. But when it came to his granny, he never resisted. She would raise lumps on his flesh; he had leftover knots on his arms and legs from when he was really small.

This passivity confused us. When Lonnie and June Bug and I tried to tell him he didn't have to put up with it, he always said, "She's my granny. She's all I got."

He'd actually laugh about the welts and bruises. He didn't brag, but he didn't hide them.

The rest of us couldn't figure it out. He would beg us to hide him from her, and then he'd always end up going home, though he could have just as easily stayed at my place or Lonnie's or June Bug's.

It seemed we spent half our playtime hiding Hamp from Miz Sparks. We knew what she thought of us--lowdown, troublemaking hoodlums. It seemed to be her mission in life to keep him away from what she was sure were our evil influences. Regardless of when she found him, she'd beat him anyway, so we might as well, we figured, put off the inevitable a little longer.

Years ago, Miz Sparks came up from the south with my grandfather and Lonnie's too. Five families jointly bought this land in southern Ohio and built their homes by hand. They even gave our neighborhood a name--Earlcrest, after Miz Sparks'

**Hamp stood a good head taller than the old bat.  
She had looked up at him, but the wide-brimmed hat cast a shadow over her face. I couldn't tell what her expression was.**

dead husband Earl. We weren't yet part of the City, we were an island on the outskirts, just off the busline, at the southern tip of the park. Two generations intermarried, weaving us all together like a fabric. Junebug was some relation to Lonnie, though when we tried to sort through the twisted limbs of that family tree, we never got it quite right. So they went as "cousins". It was easier. And since we were all raised together, I was a cousin too. When we'd meet girls at the shopping mall or the show, we'd always introduce ourselves as the four cousins. Girls went for the blood ties in a big way; it made them feel safer talking to us or sitting next to us in dark theaters.

Mostly, the girls always went for Hamp. He was undoubtedly the best looking of us. He was bright-skinned with curly hair, and he had green eyes with long lashes. The rest of us spent hours greasing up our heads to get our hair to lie flat, or else shaving our heads quo vadis style. Hamp just left his to chance and nature.

Nobody knew where Hamp's mother had gone, but rumor had it from some of the old people in the neighborhood that Miss Sparks ran her off. For what? we wondered. What had she done? Wouldn't tell her who Hamp's father was, some people said, but they always hushed up about it around us. Finding something out from the older folks was like trying to pry a stubborn lid off a can of lard with your little finger.

We could hear Miz Sparks swishing past us in the long grass; she didn't bother to look inside the old schoolhouse, she just kept on going.

At one time the schoolhouse had really been just that. A Mennonite man had come to Earlcrest and started it as part of his mission, he explained. He was our teacher and taught us all-me, Hamp, June bug, Lonnie, and the others--until we finally went to public school in the third grade. Ever since the Mennonite teacher left, the schoolhouse became a kind of playground for us, a place to congregate or just be alone. Over the years, most of the windows had been broken

out, and the floor was covered with dust and discarded cans.

When it seemed safe, we cracked the door and looked out. All we could see were some of the neighborhood girls double dutching in the dusty street where sidewalks should have been.

Hamp was stretched out lazy like a rag doll against the wall and grinning the way he did when he'd outsmarted Miss Sparks. Nothing seemed to faze him.

"Man you oughta run away," said Lonnie solemnly, sitting on his heels and chewing a blade of grass.

"She's my granny," Hamp kept grinning. "She'll be dead in a couple of years, then who'll I have?"

"Shit man," June Bug blurted. He was the smallest of us; thus, his name. He had the same dark color and roundish shape of a June Bug. When we went out "fox hunting" (looking for girls) June Bug was the "short straw" of the group--the girls' last choice. Lonnie and I split the middle pretty evenly. We relied on Hamp to be the main attraction.

"Hey, I got a joint," said June Bug matter-of-factly, pulling one from his shirt pocket.

This was when a joint was a big deal, definitely

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hard to come by for fourteen year olds.

June Bug fired it up, and pretty soon the old dusty schoolhouse filled with a bitter aroma. We all started looking around at the dust and cobwebs that were catching the late afternoon sunlight like prisms, and someone breathed, "Maaaan," with a deep sigh, and passed the joint. I rolled a bent can back and forth across the floor boards with my right foot, just to hear the sound.

Hamp started rambling, as he always did, about how he was going to go to college in New York City or Los Angeles, and how he'd send for us on weekends and show us a good time.

We all listened with the eagerness of true believers. Hamp was smart in school without acting like a schoolboy. Every night, it was said, Miz Sparks watched over him like a hawk as he sat and studied for two hours. Hamp was going to be something, even if she killed him doing it. People'd always said Miz Sparks thought she was better than the rest of us; she was going to prove it with her grandson.

When I glanced over at the others a little later, they all were giggling in the corner, trying to relight the roach, which had burned down to a millimeter.

"Forget it, man, it's gone," said Hamp, crushing it into dust in his palm.

He got up to stretch his lanky legs and tuck in his shirt. We were all stoned out of our minds.

"Now when old Miz Sparks beats him, Hamp won't feel no pain," teased Lonnie, pulling out a cheese cutter and wrestling with his thatch of nappy hair that had soaked up the grease and now spiraled all over his head.

"Boy, you better get that Brillo pad cut," said Hamp, slapping at Lonnie's head.

Lonnie ignored him and kept on combing. Hamp seemed restless and began pacing.

Sometimes when the light was just right on him, you could believe the other rumor that said his father had been a white man from the public school. Someone asked Hamp about that once and got his ass stomped right there in the middle of the park.

"Come on," I suggested, "let's get out of here. Let's walk Hamp home."

It was our ritual to walk each other the few doors up or down the street it took to get there. The last one to be dropped off usually then offered to walk the other one home, and sometimes you back and forth several times before you finally just stood on your respective porches and waved good-night. Nobody wanted to be the last.

We crawled out of the schoolhouse, ignoring the taunts of the girls down the street who claimed loudly they just *knew* what we'd been doing in there.

"Fuck these girls," said little June Bug, running alongside to keep up. "I wouldn't have you," Hamp retorted cheerfully. "You'd be lucky to get the ugliest one of the bunch." He thumped June Bug on the head.

Then, as usual, we got Hamp to tell us how he'd had just about every girl in the neighborhood in one way or another. He wouldn't specify names or places. We'd fill in the blanks and he'd smile a mysterious smile. We were all anxious because we couldn't figure out exactly how Hamp was getting

it while we weren't. When did he do it, we wondered.

"Ask the girls," was Hamp's cryptic response.

We got up to his house where Miss Sparks sat rocking back on the porch, with her knees spread and a bucket of peas in between. She was peeling back the pods and popping the peas into an old aluminum pot.

She looked up, sour-faced, sucking her teeth.

"Afternoon, Miz Sparks," we all chorused like manly southern boys. The weed had us all feeling pretty friendly.

Miz Sparks studied us for a moment from under her hat, then responded with something like, "Hmmmmph!" She began popping peas fast and mumbling under her breath about no-good trash, and how we all ought to be ashamed of ourselves, we'd all never amount to anything because we ran like a pack of wild dogs, and so on, until we slapped Hamp five and turned to go.

"You won't ever see police at my door, you young tramps!" she hollered after us. She was referring to the time a year ago when Lonnie and I got caught taking candy bars from a Lawson's.

Hamp went slowly up the porch steps, like a man prepared to face his accuser.

As we went out the gate, we heard Miz Sparks say, "Where you been this time, boy?" and then the whack of her cane on some part of his body.

I shuddered. No matter how big Hamp was, I hated him for not defending himself.

"I'd slap that old bitch cross the mouth if I was Hamp," said June Bug. "Man, she's crazy. My mother said she went nuts years ago."

Lonnie agreed. Opinions spilled from them both. I didn't say anything, I just started walking backwards in the road.

I was keeping my eye on Hamp and Miz Sparks.

Lonnie and June Bug wanted to know what I was looking at, but I said nothing. Startled by what I saw, I turned back to face the same direction they did.

"Man," sighed June Bug, "I sure got fucked up on that weed."

"You're always bragging about how good your weed is," Lonnie told him, giving him a shove. "I've had better than that."

"Me too," I said. "Your weed ain't shit, blood."

We went over and sat up in the park on the grass for a while and watched some white boys play baseball. I couldn't get something out of my mind.

At first I hadn't been able to make out Hamp and his grandmother hidden by all the vines climbing up the porch trellis. But then they moved toward each other where I could get a clear view. Hamp stood a good head taller than the old bat. She had looked up at

him, but the wide-brimmed hat cast a shadow over her face. I couldn't tell what her expression was. Hamp, on the other hand, had a look that made the blood race wildly to my head. My stomach made a kind of jump.

Miz Sparks carefully stood her walking stick against the porch railing and clumsily reached out for his free arm to steady herself. When she'd gotten her balance, she leaned into him, and lifted the pot of peas off the porch railing. Hamp accepted it like a gift, juggling it in one big hand. The other hand he extended toward her as if he were welcoming royalty. Together they walked inside to supper.



**WHITE BY DAY,  
BLACK BY NIGHT**

They sleep comfortably behind locked doors. Lifting latch I escape like dying man's last breath. Can in left hand, I shake it well. Not afraid of shadows, I stand directly under street lamp and remember another world resembling Selma, Alabama and Little Rock, Arkansas Martin Luther King and Malcolm X now known as Pretoria and Soweto Mandela and Biko. Spraypainting my black messages on white walls, I return to bed before sunrise.

Karen Jastermsky

Stratford, CT

**TRAVELS**

i have traveled feet worn blood toes thousands of white miles from the epicenter of my existence searchin' fo great black glass cities

i have traveled far away from nipple faith and foundations of me so far it takes a sweetsong to bring me back to recreate my home in this war-zone mind songs sung soulfully sweet by some serious sista

singing cushioned love for heavy-headed black men and women and these songs tease me nibble at my neck send blood warmly rushing from head to heart sitting me down on some old porch chair in my ohio hometown

sparking igniting the epicenter

where green grass cooled my feet

on sunscorchin August days

where i remember

old Georgia men mowing lawns in ohio

with minitractors and sidewalk lemonade

where i believe in pullin down pants

with thickbraided browngirls

where the sound of afternoon rain

clothed me like my mama's latenight kiss

where i believed in faraway places.

i have traveled feet worn blood toes

thousands of white miles

searchin' for great black glass cities'

where love does not mean church

where blackmen love blackmen for being blackmen

where browngirls take the time make the time take the time

where knowledge of the mind and soul are all we need to know.

but they keep telling me to create my own

to build my own to establish my own

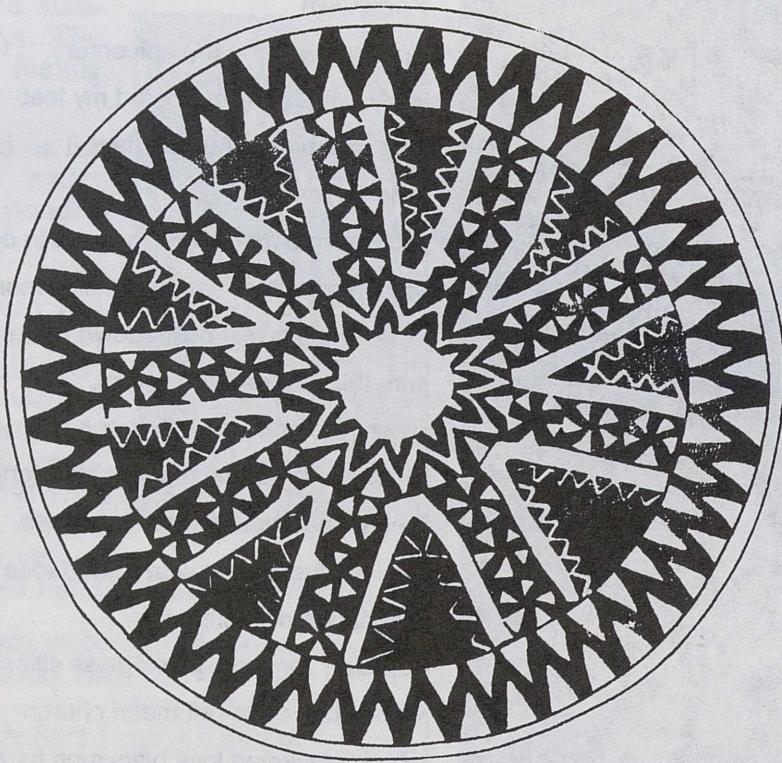
great black glass city

and i say hey okay!

Kjoseph Adkins

San Francisco, CA

# NATURAL SELECTION



by

Carol Dixon

Brooklyn, New York

**The bead lady sits  
Indian style on a dreary  
mid-town Manhattan  
street corner as people**

**pour out of subways,  
buses, and taxis and  
pack into elevators  
destined for monotony.  
She is perched on a  
small mound that is a  
colorful mixture of**

**tattered cloths, old  
blankets, and assorted  
articles of clothing. A  
large piece of white  
cloth, that may have  
once been a sheet, is  
spread before her,  
adorned with a clutter  
of beaded necklaces,  
bracelets, and  
earrings. This colorful  
array beneath her  
mocks the greyness  
around her, and,  
seated atop her  
earthbound rainbow,  
she is a distant  
marketplace flung  
haphazardly into the  
middle of a concrete  
and glass world.**

And every morning, Zenobia watches her. She watches her closely, intently, as she moves, very carefully, through this concrete and glass world, from home to office, office to home, trying hard, very hard, to keep herself from being crushed by the greyness.

She sees how the bead lady has built her own

little world in the center of this apathy and she supposes the bead lady feels protected against it. Yet she remembers that once she built a world too. But now he is gone, and her world has fallen apart. And it takes all she can do to keep the greyness from crushing her.

So she watches the bead lady every day. And she waits. Waits to see when her world will crumble too. But every morning, she is there, sitting on her colorful throne. And somewhere deep inside, Zenobia knows. She knows that the bead lady's world will always be there. But she doesn't know why. So she watches for some clue. And she wonders. As she travels from home to office, she wonders what the bead lady knows.

During the height of the lunch hour madness, the bead lady's face mimics the stone around her. Her jaws are set tight, rigid, as if welded into place. But there is a calmness, a peace, beneath the surface, that molds the stone and shapes it into a majestic dignity. Her full lips are straight, the corners refusing to reach up for a smile or reach down for a frown. She never speaks.

Only her hands move. Long, brown fingers, that live apart from her, play calmly, like well attended children, with pieces of string and loose beads. A bevy of black, brown, tan, yellow, and pale-pink fingers dance before her, signalling which of her items attracts their interest. Her own fingers pause momentarily in their game to answer their mimed questions.

Her dark eyes stare past the faces of these women on their lunch break, to someplace no one else can see. And the dreary mid-town Manhattan street corner is uncomfortably quiet, as she controls and manipulates these women with her silence.

On her way back from lunch, Zenobia forces her way through the greyness, feels the weight of it bearing down on her. She has picked at her food, blaming it, because she jerked her head around suddenly, when the man sitting behind her in the restaurant laughed, like *he* did. And just now, she



← quickened her pace, then faltered in her steps, when she realized, that the head, with that cap, in front of her, was not *his*. He is nowhere, yet everywhere.

She pauses now, to watch the high priestess of the beads pull strangers into her silent world, so confident, so secure, in her ability to reign. Zenobia watches. Closely.

To an unheard cadence, the bead lady reaches down into a pile of beads and baubles, selects one, then adds it onto the string, held captive, between her nimble fingers. But every so often, the cadence is broken. Just every so often, she picks up a bead and tosses it into a smaller pile off to her side, a pile of discarded trinkets.

Zenobia tries to find some rhythm, some pattern, something that explains how the bead lady decides which trinkets she will keep and which ones she'll discard, but she can't discern an answer. Could it be something as simple as her keeping the beads she likes, the ones she fancies? And Zenobia wonders if it is possible to do that with memories. Can you select which pieces of him you'll keep and which parts you toss away? And suddenly she is starved, hungry for an answer, but time forces her back to her office. Yet now she moves more easily through the greyness, feeding herself on this possibility. And as she makes her way back to work, she realizes that now, she wants to...needs to...has to know, what the bead lady knows.

At last the sun tires of competing with the greyness, and the concrete and glass world spews people out into the nearly darkened streets, where they climb into taxis, lumber onto buses, and scurry into holes in the earth.

But today, Zenobia has waited. Waited, because she needs to know. And only now, when all the people have disappeared from the streets, like bits of wind blown paper, does she emerge.

The bead lady no longer sits on her throne. She has gathered together all her beads and trinkets and tied them in the white cloth that was once, perhaps, a sheet. Zenobia watches her as she very meticulously disassembles her world. She smoothes and folds each tattered cloth, each old blanket, each article of clothing and then, very gently, very tenderly, she places them into an old shopping cart, and walks away.

Zenobia stands in the place where the bead lady has been, where the bead lady builds her world. And as she stands there, in the empty space, the heaviness that has been pressing in on her begins to lift, because now she realizes, that in this place, where now, no world exists, tomorrow, a new world will be standing. She watches as the bead lady moves down the street, pulling the bits and pieces of her life

behind her. And in her mind, Zenobia can picture the bead lady, early in the morning, restructuring the bits and pieces of an old world that has crumbled, and building from that a new world, her own world.

Zenobia turns and walks quickly toward the subway. "Everyone's world falls apart," she thinks to herself, and as she turns the corner, a bit of dying sun reaches through the greyness and catches her eye. And as she travels from office to home, she feels that finally she's beginning to know what the bead lady knows.



## \*\* BLACK MEN BEWARE \*\*

it's been said B4

and i'm sure it will

B said again:           BLACK women have a helluva  
time with their BLACK men

and todayz generation of

BLACK women got it even worse

cause they have broken away from the  
roles of mother and maid  
and decided to make new choices

BUT BLACK men are slow to

accept the:       changin roles

                  changin attitudes

and would much rather their BLACK women B  
                  changin diapers

and with this new generation the rules of the game have changed

from:           don't sleep w/no man  
                  til he slide that ring  
                  on your finger

to:              do what ever makes you happy

                  BUT don't B no fool

                  & don't never think you the only one

today for the BLACK woman luvin seems to cum eazy

when she is willing to step back

and give up a little of her new identity

### \*\* BUT BLACK MEN TAKE CAUTION \*\*

this is only the beginning

BLACK women ain't movin NOwhere

BUT

forward!!!

elaine m. edwards

east lansing, mi



# Of Gazelle & Hungry Leopards

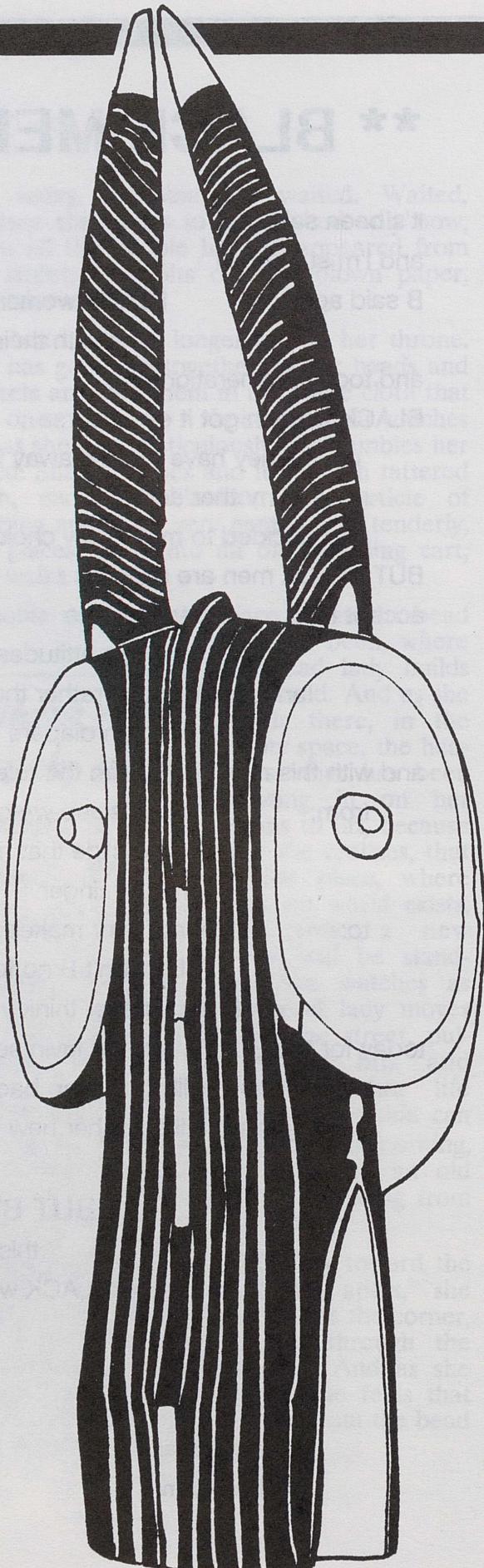
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by Cathleen Richardson

Pittsburgh, PA

*...in seventeen ninety-five these slaves did not have the character which you've seen in films and novels of the South. They were not soft-spoken, brown-skinned people in drab rags who spoke an English dialect. They were Africans.... [and] the slave cabins ...were a foreign country, an African coast after dark, in which not even the coldest overseer would want to wander.*

*Interview With The Vampire,*  
Anne Rice



The sisters knelt together on the auction block naked, shackled and fettered. They were children, only twelve years old, and their arms wrapped boldly and in fear around each other, had long lost consciousness.

They were an unusual pair, these African twins. Were they kissing? prospective buyers stroked their chins and wondered aloud. For the girls' faces touched--nose to nose. But one careful buyer approached the girls and noticed not kissing but an exhaling by one girl into the nostrils of the other. The other inhaled-greedily-savored-and exhaled back to her sister. Breathing a familiar smell was all it was. And every now and again one could hear an incomprehensible click-sound and a whispered mumbling between them,

"Shanthie."

"Zenzi."

The careful buyer approached the girls again, this time escorting his wife. They were newly-weds and plantation life was new to this gentle young thing. She was the daughter of a wealthy northern statesman. On a business trip, the careful buyer was introduced to her. Their marriage was a lucrative business arrangement. The wife became a student, on slave matters, to her more knowledgeable husband.

"I have decided we shall purchase them together," the careful buyer explained, "because of their uniqueness, age, and health. If fertile, they will add to our riches."

After being close to the twins, the young bride felt the need to touch them, but asked her husband rather if she might name them.

"Look," the careful buyer went on to say, "at the eyes on this one."

"She must always be watched. See the way she looks at us? Her eyes tell me she is without fear--yet."

"Perhaps the softness of the other will rub off on this one," the young bride ventured timidly.

The careful buyer was astounded by his young bride's perception. He congratulated her heartily. She enjoyed her husband's praise and lifted her lovely lips to him as thank you.

The young bride's jubilance was in keeping with the festive mood of the day. The fresh cargo of Africans; the huge ships docked that had carried them here; the barker's loud voice instigating the buying and selling of new and used property; all contributed to the transformation of this otherwise dreary town square. Everywhere, there were wagons and children and husbands and wives. Parasols and hearty "hellos" shouted across the square to neighbors and friends. It was New Year's Day. Annually, the most worthwhile day for those shrewd business men and women in the market of selling human lives. It was also a carnival of sorts, a lighthearted gathering of good, hard-working, God-fearing, Christian men and women.

As the careful buyer helped his wife into their wagon he asked, "Have you thought of names my dear?"

The young bride answered proudly, "Yes. Sarah for the soft one and Callie for the other with the callous eyes."

Alone now on the road, the careful buyer and his wife were silent, each lost in thoughts of the day and of their future together. The twins continuously shifted positions in the back of the wagon, searching for comfort from the chains that bit deep into their flesh. The husband and wife glanced at each other and were filled with a warm glow, their thoughts interrupted, every now and again, by the incomprehensible click-sound, the drag of chains on the floor of the wagon and the whispered mumbling,

"Shanthie;"

"Zenzi"

coming from the back.

Cleanliness is a virtue. The careful buyer and his wife patterned their lives after this thought. Starched lace curtains danced at windows whose reflection bounced off hardwood floors polished to a glassy hue. Priceless antiques of brass and silver shone luminously. Dinner smells of sweet ham and candied yams reminded the couple of the time. The careful buyer escorted his wife to dine.

Were there different degrees of dirt? Perhaps

yes. Some of the dirt was packed and shiny, something like hardwood floors. Some of the dirt was grainy. Specks of it flew loose, found a niche in Shanthie's large brown eyes and a permanent tear attached itself to her cheek. It rained last night and some of the dirt was wet and soggy. The rain whooshed in boldly through opened spaces reserved for windows leaving

puddles of mud behind to remind the girls of nightmares they experienced from the thunder--and the lightning--and the shadows--of huge, looming, trees.

Dinnertime conversation in the big house centered on slave matters. Shanthie, renamed Sarah for her softness, learned quickly and was thought a fine slave. The careful buyer had lost patience with the other, Zenzi, renamed Callie because of her callous eyes. Zenzi was repelled by her Callie name and resisted.

"Two church ladies stopped by today for tea. They wanted to welcome me. I told them of the problem we were experiencing with Callie. They said we must treat them all like children and that punishment is the only way."

The careful buyer loved his wife dearly. She was an excellent student.

Dinnertime conversation down in the cabin centered around plans determining correct courses of action.

"If you do not respond correctly he will continue to beat you," Shanthie explained to Zenzi. "Do not fight back with Xosa words so vile, our mother surely be ashamed. You must learn to survive here."

Zenzi interrupted.

"Think of our father, that brave and glorious man. Think also of the man our father destroyed on the great ship only because of the man's rudeness to us. Think, dear Shanthie, of our father now. He is dead you know. Our father could do many things but to survive in so much water is impossible. Our father taught us bravery. How can I behave less than that?"

Shanthie lowered her voice to answer because the

careful buyer was near. The after dinner bell from the big house was ringing. Breezes remaining from last night's storm carried the careful buyer's scent to them as warning. He would be just beyond the clearing. Watching. Listening. As if he understood.

"Remember our plans," Shanthie whispered close to her sister's ear. "We shall return home. Is that not correct? Have our plans changed any since we last discussed them? It is important that you protect your strength. If the beatings continue, you will die. And remember this -- if you are weak when the time comes, I will go alone."

The careful buyer could not hide the surprise etched on his face when Zenzi anticipated his presence at her back. It wasn't a difficult feat to master. She did not hear his footsteps because it was true, the careful buyer was stealthy. She simply smelled him, picked up his scent in the breeze the way as a gazelle might of hungry leopards lying in wait.

He spoke firmly, "Callie." There was no acknowledgment, and so the careful buyer's blow to Zenzi was deafening. It was dark to her and then it was light all around. Zenzi's head

pounded from inside to out. Her lips swelled instantly and blood oozed down her throat. Garbled sounds came forth. She was knocked to the ground and felt the bottom of the careful buyer's boot lose itself in the pit of her stomach.

Never would Zenzi dare strike back. She wanted to, but realized intuitively that her weapon was her voice. She delighted in watching the careful buyer's face writhe in anger as she shouted in her most formal Xosa all manner of vulgarity and profane speech. She drew her tongue down from the roof of her mouth -- seductively. The resulting !clicks led to the careful buyer's most base indignation but ultimately the strange mumblings and !clicks ended his tirade upon her.

The careful buyer was afraid.

The child, Zenzi, knew this.

She lay crumpled on the ground and through the pounding beat of her ear drums, she followed her sister's voice and she listened. Through the blood in her eyes, she watched her sister's mouth.

"Remember the story father told us of the wise, wild boar. Grandfather took father hunting when father was very young and the wild boar tricked our father into believing it was dead. Father was an impatient lad. He might have left the animal there to look for more exciting things had it not been for the wisdom of the old man. Lie quietly Zenzi. This white man is not wise at all."

Shanthie whispered apologies to Zenzi for dragging her body over the hard and bumpy terrain. Shanthie's apologies were polite gestures, soothing birdlike noises, for Shanthie realized Zenzi's body had stopped registering pain long ago. The careful buyer had not been kind. Shanthie's real task was to minimize her sister's fear. They were children and the thought of lowering Zenzi's body to the ground was chilling.

The air was good by the big tree and the leaves and branches bending down touched the ground to mark a place for Zenzi's safekeeping.

Shanthie accepted the wings of a soothing breeze. Mother? A gentle comforting feeling wrapped itself around her and the wind brought a message that this was the

place to lay her sister, temporarily.

Shanthie knelt to prepare the ground with the same shovel the careful buyer used to enforce his rules. She was careful not to dig deep. At the grave's completion, Shanthie rolled her sister in and sprinkled handfuls of dirt over Zenzi's covered face. Zenzi stiffened as she felt the thump, thump of earth being thrown over her body. As Shanthie worked, she put her mouth close to Zenzi's shroud. She pretended to cry out and wail and moan, as was expected behavior, all the while reassuring her sister.

"It is not deep Zenzi. It will be dark soon and then we will run."

Zenzi answered Shanthie from below and through closed lips. They were identical twins, born not quite two minutes apart. Their communication was spiritual. ➔

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*Shanthie renamed Sarah for her softness, learned quickly and was thought a fine slave. The careful buyer had lost patience with the other, Zenzi, renamed Callie because of her callous eyes.*

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‘I am not afraid. We will run. The air will be fresh and clean. The stench of the pale man’s scent will be at our backs. No matter our troubles now, for we are in control. Think of home, Shanthie. Remember the sounds the elephants made? It was unnatural to see them running away. They are enormous and without fear. Yet they learned also to run away from the pale man’s scent. Imagine. Elephants once carefree, chasing freedom. Perhaps if I tried to relax, this might be easier to endure. Freedom must be our life’s force. My only fear, I have discovered, like the elephants at home, is restraint. Is it inevitable Shanthie? This restraint? Perhaps that is why we shall run. Forever.’

The sun slowly set sending shadows, and ominous silhouettes against the horizon. The night’s coloring became a black, black. The menacing shadow of the careful buyer slithered away. He would not return until the next morning’s light.

The sisters reached the water finally after being tricked many times by the noises of little streams along the way. And now, exhausted from their running, they fell to the ground.

“We’ll wait for the ship that brought us here and sneak aboard.”

“We’ll hide way down deep in the ship and let

it take us home.”

“We’ll be so quiet, no one will ever know we’re there.”

“Only the rats who cannot speak to tell.”

“Think about mother and home,” Shanthie whispered. “It is our only strength.”

“We are,” the sisters said together. In unison. Word on-top-of-word.

They looked at each other and giggled. Shanthie finished the sentence they had begun together.

“We are lost, sister. Are we not?”

“Perhaps,” Zenzi replied. “But, this moment we are free. Can you feel it? We *are* here and we *are* together. *That* is our strength.”

Shanthie and Zenzi lay on God’s cold ground. The owls resolved to protect the young girls. They became sentinels and turned their heads three hundred and sixty degrees. The crickets rubbed their tiny legs together and sang a soothing lullaby. The great water was wet and continued to move and wave and move. The stars twinkled in the nighttime sky and sent a bright message across the water of two little African girls far from home.



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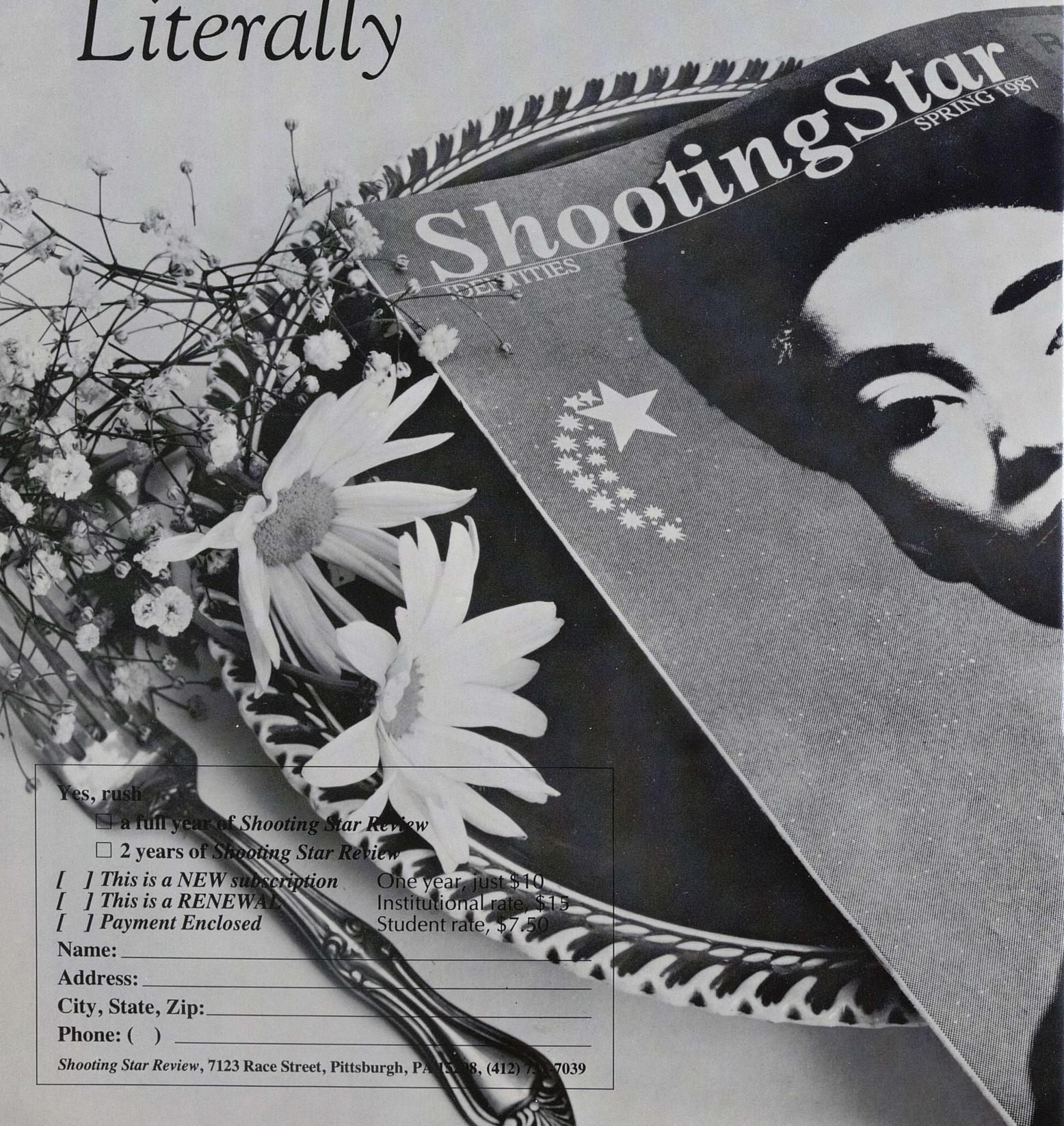
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