

*The
Bayou*

Review

Fall 1989

Front Cover:

UNTITLED

JOHN MARTINI

The Bayou Review welcomes contributions of poetry, fiction, essay, artwork, and photography from the students, faculty and staff of the University of Houston-Downtown. Contributions should be typewritten and should be submitted, with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, to *The Bayou Review*, UH-Downtown Center, 101 Main St., Houston, Texas, 77002.

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Fall 1989

**The University of Houston-Downtown
One Main Street, Houston, Texas 77002**

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Dedicated to the memory of Mickey Leland.



PANE

JACQUELINE M. AGUILERA

St. Theresa's hospital was filled with Society's forgotten elderly. Within this charity hospice were Mr. Davis and Mr. Moore. They were roommates in a small cubicle that was just large enough for their twin beds and one antiquated chair. Both had to be kept quiet and still. There was no television and no radio. Their only interaction with the world consisted of a window. Mr. Moore had to spend all of his time on his back. However, Mr. Davis, as a part of his treatment (something to do with draining the fluid from his lungs), was allowed to sit up in bed for one hour every afternoon.

When not focussing on the window, Mr. Moore and Mr. Davis would talk for hours about their wives, children, hobbies, childhoods, war experiences, and vacations. In reality, the wives were dead; the children never visited; the hobbies had been taken; the childhoods were far gone and lost; the war experiences buried with the battlefields; and the vacations existing as dusty webs of memory. The window was the only source of life that penetrated their cryptic existence, and Mr. Moore greatly anticipated Mr. Davis' treatment — when he would report the world's activities.

"We're overlooking a park with a blue lake and there are ducks waddling up to some young children throwing them bread. And there's a boy, about six years old, sitting by the lake sailing model boats, while two lovers are walking hand-in-hand beneath the oak trees. The flowers are apple red this season and the grass kelly green."

Softball games were played every Sunday afternoon, while Mr. Davis and Mr. Moore made wagers as to which team would win. At times when his hour at the window was exhausted before the game ended, they would go with the highest scoring team. In case of a tie, they agreed to carry all wagers over towards the next Sunday's game. Mr. Moore drank in every word and devoured each image within his mind.

One Saturday afternoon, there was some sort of parade. As Mr. Davis began to describe the procession, Mr. Moore's thoughts wandered.

"There's a cute young blonde majorette leading the band..."

"Why should Davis get the pleasure of seeing what's going on all the time?"

"It's the City High School Band and they're wearing new blue and white uniforms..."

"Why can't I see?"

"Hey, it's the Shriners in those funny red racers, and they're zigzagging all around this group of clowns with candy pink hair! And..."

Mr. Moore tried not to think anymore as Mr. Davis' words faded into oblivion.

The following Sunday, the ninth softball game of the season was played. Mr. Davis' Tigers were leading Mr. Moore's Bears by three points. During the fourth inning, the rains came down. The game was called, Mr. Moore's Tigers were declared victorious.

"How can I be sure you just didn't say they were winning because it started to rain and you would have lost, again!"

"You're just sore 'cause you was losing. I'm tired and don't want to argue with you."

"You don't have to worry about doing anything with me anymore. I'm tired of you, too!"

"You're being ridiculous."

"Don't talk to me."

"Ok, fine. If that's what you want."

After a few days of silence, Mr. Moore became more cynical. Obsessed with the window, he pouted, couldn't sleep, and grew more seriously ill. The doctors did not understand. Mr. Davis and Mr. Moore did. Mr. Davis gazed out the window and chuckled to himself, amused with what he could see. Mr. Moore slumped into the wall, a pillow enveloping his head.

One evening, Mr. Moore lay in his bed, staring at the ceiling and counting holes.

"One, two, three . . ."

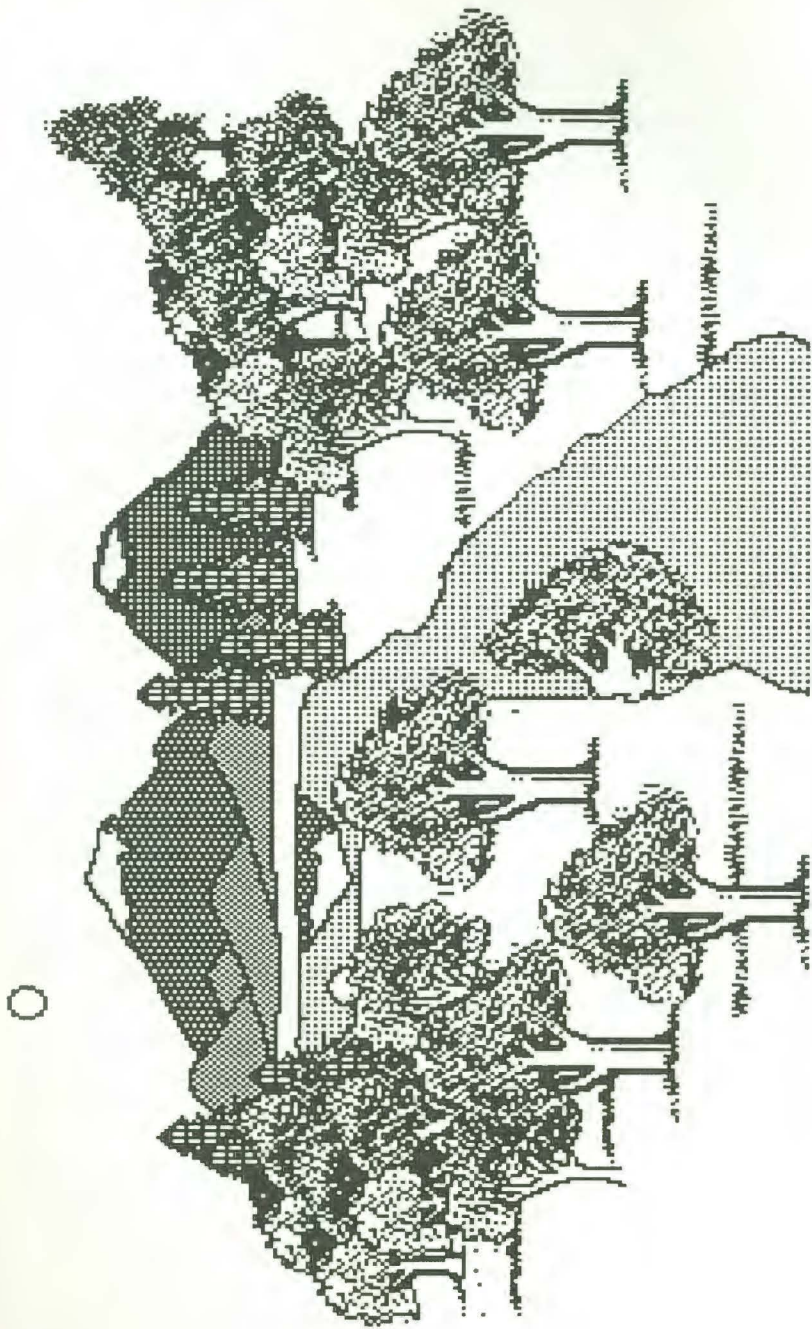
Suddenly, Mr. Davis awoke, coughing and choking as the fluid raped his lungs. He grasped wildly for the call button

that would bring the night nurse to their room. Resembling a black panther, Mr. Moore watched. His coughs breaking the silent darkness like shattering glass, Mr. Davis' eyes bulged as a final cough escaped his lips and a vaporous, exhausted breath melted into the pitch.

Mr. Moore blinked his eyes, focussing on the dead body in his room. Satisfied, he turned his head and began counting the holes in the ceiling again: "One, two, three . . ."

In the morning, the day nurse came in with water for the two men's sponge baths. Mr. Moore pretended to be asleep as the nurse tried to wake Mr. Davis' iced form. Later, they took the pillar of flesh away quietly, and without a fuss, trying not to disturb Mr. Moore.

As soon as it seemed decent, Mr. Moore asked if he could be moved to the bed next to the window. Feeling that he wanted to try and preserve his friend's memory by staying in Mr. Davis' bed, the nurse moved Mr. Moore, tucked him in, and made him comfortable. When they left the room, Mr. Moore lifted his eyes towards the window. Summoning the remnants of strength within him, Mr. Moore began to pull himself upright. The seconds faded into minutes as his muscles strained, sweat running down his face. With one last "Umph!" he managed to sit up, turn his head, peer outside, and then collapse backwards onto his pillow. The window had faced a sandstone wall.

**BEHOLD***DIANE JASSO*

Step into a world of dust and rain.
See the children running from the hands of pain
and sightless doves who no longer sing of lust and love.
Behold our sins.
For we no longer belong to the heaven above.

I cry out to the eyes that refuse to see.
And that I do not speak for the crimes
against myself.
I speak for the children who have
yet to live.
And those that have little chance of surviving.

JOURNEY TO THE EAST

TOMAS VALLEJOS

If I came in search of light
It is here.
I know I have arrived
After the Fall.

Some faithless have told me
It is nothing.
They say that I have travelled far
To witness nothing
More than a hoax.

They point to that naked tree
Ash gray and praying
To an empty sky.
They etch its useless pleas
In charcoaled oak
Stripped to limbs and twigs.

They sap the juice
From holidays
Snuff the candle
Bash the mocking grin
Of flickering Jack O'lantern.
They pull the plug
On every Xmas tree in sight.

And knowing they are right
Would I dare disturb their universe?
Could I rock the branches back
Endlessly
To their green boys'
Glow of summer?

Knowing they are right
Could I see the leaves
In full flame as they fall?

TOMAS VALLEJOS

Could I weave bare trees to November lace
Fine feathered elegance
Reaching high against the sky?

If not now, I never can.
Even as I turn my back
To the shining east
The moon is rising high and bright
Over the slumbering cloudy mass.

It winks November neon
Grins above the harvest
Twinkles, tips its stubbled top
Sprinkling sugar over

The Days of all the Dead.

ANNUIT COEPTIS (He Has Smiled on Our Undertakings)

BILL RICHARDSON

The furnaces roared
and poured out
tons of molten metal
to be rolled shaped

into pipe for transporting and refining
precious minerals to provide playthings
for a self-indulgent, wasteful nation

Forget

the foul air
the spoiled land
the poisoned streams

Where is Love Canal, anyway?

into flat plate to build and provision
hideous toys for men of war
wasting in the vines of a lost nation

Forget

the children
the innocent
the lost lives

BILL RICHARDSON

Who cares about My Lai, anyway?

into beams to raise steel and glass
temples and towers for the bottom liners
Babelian monoliths to their green-backed deity

Forget

the hungry
the homeless
the needy

Who cares about Allen Parkway Village, anyway?

LET IT SNIRT

DON ALDRAH

Nothing on earth could make living in Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, more pleasant than those blinding blizzards that came with sub-zero temperatures and enough wind to bury a two-story home under a few hundred pounds of snow. Only a really powerful blizzard could create snirt, the highest grade snow in the land, to an adhesive perfection.

Snirt was yucky, icky, nasty, ugly snow that was riddled with dirt and grass and sticks and leaves (and sometimes matter I always suspected came from Lucky, Veronica Ackley's dog). But, wow, did it stick! I'm not sure what functioned as its cohesive element (though I've always suspected it was that Lucky matter), but that snirt produced snowballs guaranteed to hold fast until they made contact with the back of Veronica Ackley's new-army-green-parka-hooded head.

Snirtballs were so durable they could double as bricks. (Just pile snirtballs into the desired formation and add water.) Snirt, fused into an icy fortress, held up to anything. Even our crudest igloos would protect us from any retaliatory tactics Veronica had in mind, such as the-old-kick-until-I-come-up-with-a-better-retaliatory-tactic method. Her best soldier, Lucky, couldn't even penetrate our forts, not with all the slobber in the world.

Snirt produced some wonderful snirtmen, as well. But rolling and stacking snirt into huge balls was tedious and not really considered a recreational activity—unless, of course, the snirtmen filled in for Veronica as targets in preparation for Tuesday's mid-morning-recess snirtball fight and workout. Mrs. LeVadney, the recess monitor, constantly warned us not to play so rough so early in the day, but she didn't understand that rough-housing at 10 a.m. was our only chance to work up an appetite for North Plain Elementary's traditional Tuesday menu: One cold, bland wiener with cold, tangy sauerkraut; your choice of heavily buttered or scantily peanut-buttered bread; Turtle-Waxed beans; and warm, musty milk.

Our most vigorous recess workouts came from playing king (or queen) of the mountain. The object was to get to the top of a snirt drift before anyone else and to remain there

DON ALDRAH

while others, vying for the throne, pulverized you with snirtballs. There was only one person who ever got to the top, though—George—and the rest of us couldn't climb high enough to pulverize him. We later discovered the reason George could scale a snirt drift in record time was that he had better snow boots than anyone else. While the rest of us got our super-duper snow grippers at the base exchange, this guy had bought double super-duper, all-pro cliff hangers at K-mart. We knew that as long as he had those boots and as long as our parents continued to shop at the base exchange, no one else would ever be King. George was now in the same category as Veronica and we had no choice but to disqualify him.

But after we discharged George, we realized that, despite all our efforts to reach the apex, no one was ever going to be King and there would no longer be any one to plaster with snirtballs. Reluctantly, we let George resume his reign as King. But George came up with a better idea.

Let Veronica be Queen!

His idea met with unanimous approval. George helped Veronica up the mountain under the pretense that he wanted her to be his Queen; then quickly, and much to Veronica's surprise, he slid down and joined the rest of us in "our quest for the throne." Actually, we did not want her to leave the throne; now we had a legitimate reason to smack her new-army-green-parka-hooded head. Boy, what a workout!

Now that I think about it, nothing on earth could make living in Minot Air Force Base more pleasant than those snirt producing blizzards and a good ol' moving target...Veronica Ackley.

WHAT CAN IT BE

JOSANA L. POWELL AND SAMUEL W. JOHNSON

Something follows me wherever I go.
When I turn around it's gone,
But I can feel its presence.
It's not anything I can see or hear,
But something I can feel inside my bones.
I wish it would disappear forever,
But it sticks like a glove.
You ask, "What can it be?"
It's my past.

THE SEA OTTERS

JENNIFER FLESNER

I love the way they swim and play
with childish spontaneity
and life-like glee
Together — Apart
Twirling and Swirling in the Sea
So Free as they glide to the depths
then in a moment back again
Why can't that be me?

Instead, I am rooted here
Filled with Fear
Striving to find the place
where I can be free
And let my Spirit Soar
Spontaneously
Like the otters in the sea.

NATALIE

AMBER M. MCLEAN

Her life had been one devastation after another. She was a friend with many problems that surfaced after a long series of custody battles between her parents. She never felt her parents really wanted or loved her. She believed they only wanted to seek revenge on each other. She always felt neglected, with the end result being her gradual addiction to drugs and the consequences that followed.

Natalie began her journey downhill at the vulnerable age of thirteen. She dropped out of school in the ninth grade. She started experimenting with crack-cocaine, and became friends with more practiced drug users.

In the months to follow, her face, youthful and exuberant, began to sag and darken. Her golden silk hair lost its gleam. At one point, her perfect figure of 105 pounds was diminished to eighty-five. A once patient and loving girl had transformed into a rude, rebellious, and terribly unhappy person.

Religiously, every night, she set out in need of a fix. She wore a blue jean mini-skirt, tube top, and high heels. Her hair was teased and plastered with hair spray. Her face was like an over-painted canvas. She stated once, "People tend to be nicer if you look good. They won't even charge if you treat them right."

The usual street she walked was Dowling. This evening she was approached by a friend. "Yo Nat, what's up?" Darrell inquired.

"Not much, I need a rock. Where's the action?"

"I'm on my way to see some friends. Come on, we'll fix you up."

Natalie followed Darrell until they reached the apartment. Inside stood five other men. One of the men, stunned by her beauty asked, "Hey-hey babe, what's up?"

"Nothing, blood," she answered, "just looking for some candy."

Another guy handed her a loaded syringe, saying, "Pump it up, baby."

Her eyes became huge as she raised her arm to insert the needle. She started shaking as she injected it. The rush

brought Natalie to her knees. Trying to focus, she began looking around. There was no furniture in the room. The floor was covered with beer cans and bottles, trash, used syringes, and human feces. None of it bothered Natalie, for she sat there, glad to be high.

"Hey, dude," she said a few minutes later, "let's do another one."

"Not till you give us something," Darrell informed her.

"Tell your friends to leave," she said, "and we'll have our own party."

"No way, we're all going to have a party," they all responded together, while dragging her towards the bedroom. One of the men held a knife to her throat and said, "Just shut up and be a good girl."

Panic and shock had consumed her small frame. They began ripping off the clothes that clung to her body from perspiration. Fright filled her as each man had his turn. She started crying as she begged, "Please let me go."

The men held her tighter as she thought, "I've got to do something." She grasped a bottle from the floor, and hurled it towards the window. Breaking the window and distracting the men, she tried to get up and run. Darrell seized her foot, and pulled as hard as possible.

Natalie fell and her face hit the floor. She felt the sharp pain piercing her body. The blood poured from her nose and lip. Continuing to cry, she yelled, "Just leave me alone and go away!"

Subsequently, the man with the knife became frenzied and screamed, "I told you to shut up, and now you're going to pay." Then, taking the knife, he made a long gash across Natalie's left breast.

The pain was excruciating, and she felt extremely weak from the loss of blood. She lay there until the men were through with their sadistic actions. They left, taking with them her purse and clothes.

She was glad to be alive, but her body ached with pain. She looked as though death would accept her at any moment.

Her once blonde hair was caked with blood, while the rest of her body was covered with cuts and bruises from head to toe.

She managed to get to the bedroom door where she then collapsed. Her body went limp as she drifted out of consciousness. The next thing she knew, she was in the hospital and was to remain there for at least a week.

Ten days later, she was released. On the way from the hospital, she sighed, "God, it's been over a week, and I really need a fix." That evening she was back on Dowling Street.

DISTORTED IMAGES

MARTY MANEGOLD

I hang on the wall, ten feet
of highly polished silver-backed
glass, at a right angle to the
sink-pitted countertop.

They glide into the room
and land, teetering on the
floor. Mirrored in me, they preen
their exquisite feathers.

I see some opposite me,
flamingo-stanced before
closed stall doors,
anxiously awaiting a vacancy.

Their eyes never leave me
as they chirp excitedly to
their neighbors,

dusting faces, darkening
lips, spraying scent,
preparing themselves
for show.

They return to class
preened and polished,
presenting splendid
facades for their public.

Randomly, carelessly,
thoughtlessly, they have
left their droppings:

hairy porcelain sinks,
paper towel crumpled countertops,
toilet paper littered floors, and
murky unflushed toilets.



LEST WE FORGET

SEAN P. O'NIELL

He was many things to many people — a son, a brother, a husband, a father and a friend.....

He didn't demand anything of his country or its people, only understanding and respect, this he so dearly earned.

He was fully prepared for the horrors that were to present themselves as was humanly possible.

His courage and unwavering devotion to duty were unfathomable as was his dedication to God, honor and country.

He did so very much for freedom, yet he was always willing to do so much more.

He fought upon the Plains of Abraham, at Dieppe and at the Battle of Bull Run with courage and valor.

He faced the murderous assault of enemy machine-gun fire as he scrambled from the vermin and death-infested muddy trenches of Flanders and the Argonne Forest in World War I relentlessly driving forth.

He hit the beaches in Europe and the Pacific in World War II and refused to retreat in the face of adversity and superior odds.

He landed at Inchon, Korea and drove the enemy from his own soil, never giving quarter.

He slogged through the rice paddies of Indo-China in search of an invisible enemy and was showered with contempt and scorn by his own countrymen upon his return — yet, he never lost faith.

He plunged into the dawn skies over Granada to free his fellow Americans from the grasp of terrorists, in the name of justice.

SEAN P. O'NIELL

He came in many colors and from countless cities, farms, and small towns across North America, but he was always one and the same.

He was many things to many people, and he wore many different uniforms, but he was still the same son, brother, husband, father and friend so many of us knew.

And still, today, he remains ever vigilant and ready to protect the freedoms and liberties that so many take for granted.

He will always remain the embodiment of freedom for the oppressed of the world wherever they live, for he is a living symbol of peace.

He is the North American fighting man.

A MATTER OF PREJUDICE

J. CRANE

"I will not let that White woman get away with this!" Starissa Jackson thought to herself as she appraised her image in the restroom mirror. The pale blue blouse and the blue-and-white flowered skirt she wore looked cool against her dark brown skin. Her hair was just right, too, big curls all over in a new hairdo that she'd paid \$35 for last Saturday. It was a big chunk out of last week's pay from her part-time job and her Mama would kill her if she knew. But this was Starissa's first term in college and she had to look right. No one in her family—not even Joe Junior, her brother, who was supposed to be the almighty smartest Jackson alive—had gone to college. So it was very important.

That's why she had to talk to her freshman English instructor. That White lady had been slashing her papers to pieces, giving her failing marks. One of those writing pieces she had worked on for almost three hours at home in the kitchen one night. It was about "Jewel," the kitty-cat she had when she was six years old, and that her Mama took away from her, giving it to Joe Junior to tie up in a bag and throw off the bridge into the bayou. She was proud of that paper and when she got it back from that lady it was covered with red pencil marks and there was a big red "F" at the top. She knew it couldn't be that bad. Besides, English had always been one of her better subjects. In fact she'd made almost solid B's in English in high school. 'Course she had had Mizz Johnson as her English teacher for her last three years. *She* understood Starissa and she was easy to talk to and she helped her with her writing and to get ready for her exams. Naturally, it was easier for Starissa to learn from her 'cause she was Black and went to Mount Olive Street Baptist Church like her family did. Mizz Johnson understood her. This White lady, with her drippy Deep South accent and her prissy, Old Maid ways could never understand her.

When Starissa arrived, the door was open and the woman bent over her desk, her glasses only six inches or so from the paper she was reading. She stopped every few seconds to put red marks on the lined paper. Starissa wondered if that were

J. CRANE

her latest essay!

Starissa took a deep breath and stepped in.

"Oh, Miss Jackson," the woman drawled when she looked up. "Sit down, please." Starissa hated the way she addressed her as "Miss Jackson," not "Starissa" like her high school teachers had called her. And she was sure there was a condescending tone to the way she drew out the word, "Miss," like she was making fun of her.

"I'm glad you came in," the woman continued. "Really, if your writing doesn't improve dramatically, I'm afraid you may not pass the course." The White lady's eyes looked bigger than they really were because they were magnified through her thick glasses. Starissa decided she was really an ugly person.

Starissa had to force herself to speak. "Yeah, I don't understand why you've been giving me those bad grades. English has always been one of my best subjects."

The woman looked surprised. Her small thin mouth set into a false smile. "Really? Where did you go to high school, Miss Jackson?"

"My Savior Christian Academy," Starissa answered proudly. "It's a private school." She thought of all the sacrifices her Gramma Stewart had made for her to go there.

The lady frowned. "Oh," was all she said. Then she drew in her breath and pulled out a paper from the stack on the right side of her desk. Starissa recognized her own handwriting; it was her last essay on the person she admired most, Martin Luther King. Her instructor tilted the paper down slightly and, even reading upside down, Starissa could see a big red "F" at the top. It made her angry.

"That's my paper," she said, hearing her own voice become edged with emotion.

"Yes," the White woman sighed. "I'm new here at the college and I don't know this high school you went to, My Savior Academy—"

"My Savior *Christian* Academy," Starissa interrupted, rather loudly.

The woman frowned and paused a moment. "My Savior

Christian Academy," she repeated. Starissa really couldn't stand the fake way she talked, like someone out of the movie, *Gone with the Wind*. "Evidently you didn't get the basic fundamentals you need for college work. To succeed, you'll need to get a lot of extra help," she continued. She handed the paper across the table, but Starissa didn't take it and the three dog-eared sheets of lined paper dropped to the top of the desk between them. Seeming not to notice, the White lady went on, "I have marked the errors on this paper and I've put the page numbers in our English handbook where you can find some guidance for correcting them."

Starissa did not answer nor pick up the essay. She was remembering what her Daddy had warned her about when she had decided to enter the community college on the opposite side of town from where she lived rather than go to the Black college where most of her friends went. He had repeated what he often said when the subject of Blacks associating with Whites came up. "You don't let them walk over you, girl. I don't care what they says, they's so much hatred left in those White folks, God knows. They just love to get you in there and then make a fool out of you. They'll try to get to you one way t'other. Maybe give you failin' marks and then tell everybody jus' proves Black Folks taint smart enough. I seen it. Same thing as down at the plant where Joe Junior got that job jes' after he quit school. The God Almighty smartest Jackson alive, and they run him off like some dumb animal. Don't you let them treat you like no damn nigger. You is a lady jes' like your Mama Stewart and a pretty one at that and you're not dumb. You are a high school grad'jit, next to Joe Junior, the smartest one of my childs." As she remembered her Daddy's words, her resolve strengthened.

The White teacher was saying something about going to a special lab or something in the afternoons, but Starissa wasn't listening. She had had enough. She stood up.

"Listen," she said, her voice tight and shrill. "I knows exactly what's going here. My Daddy told me this would happen. You got no right to treat me like this. I don't imag-

ine your White students are getting grades like this!" She picked up the essay and threw it down again. The dog-eared pages separated and one sheet drifted to the floor.

The instructor leaned back in her chair, her eyes wide with disbelief, her little thin mouth open in a small "O."

"Just because I am Black and I went to a Black private school! I am just as smart as the next one and you and no other White bigots are going to stop me. I have a right to be at this college!"

"Miss J-Jackson," the woman stammered. "I'm sure you--"

Starissa did not let her finish. "And, furthermore," she continued, "my Daddy's best friend is Dr. Stanton, the pastor at Mount Olive Street Baptist Church and a big NAACP leader, and when he hears about this, I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't have a lawsuit! And, let me tell you when it comes down to who stays in this college, me or you—it won't be me that'll be going!"

The White Southerner seemed to go even paler. "I-I-I'm sorry if I've done anything to make you think—" she started in breathless, small voice and then stopped still. She took her thick, ugly glasses off with a shaky left hand. Tears began to seep slowly down her cheeks. She looked utterly shocked and bewildered.

Starissa didn't wait. She had stood her ground and had spoken her piece; so she turned and, with her chin tilted up and her shoulders back, she marched out of the room leaving the startled and speechless White woman immobile at her desk.

As they hurried out of the building, across the parking lot, toward the street corner where the municipal bus would come by, Starissa was happy with herself because she knew how proud her Daddy would be when she told him about it. There were only two things that bothered her, underneath all of the independence and strength she felt: Why did her instructor look so shocked? And why was she crying? Later on, when she had calmed down a bit, she'd have to think about that some more.

STROKE OF REALITY

KHATIJA KHWAJA

At Night when your Eyes cry
And ruin your pillow
And you hear thunder
Outside your window
And then the darkness overwhelms
And leads you to
Pits of depression and loneliness

Then you long for days gone by
Youth long spent now
And you wonder
And think
Then Fantasize
All the good things you want

Later, with a sweet smile
you drift off to sleep
Where you find happiness
In a land of Dreams

But as the sun comes up
And kisses your cheek
You wake up with a smile
To the brightness of the day
Which vanishes,
When you think of who
You are
And what you have
And the long lonely day ahead
Then you want to weep and cry,

But Hope consoles
Someday you will sleep
And never get up again.

LOVE

JOYANNE BELTRAN

Love
Can send your heart soaring,
Give it power to dance on air.
Then
As suddenly as coming,
It goes
Leaving you
dangling.

THE STAR

JOYANNE BELTRAN

High in the velvet skies of night
I spy a tiny star.
I would touch it with my hand —
Would the universe the way not bar.
For this precious jewel of night
For you love could bring.
You may have one, one fine day,
Surrounded by a wedding ring.

WE DIDN'T KNOW

THEODORE H. & SAMUEL W. JOHNSON

Ma worked hard scrubbing Miss Anne's floors, and washing Miss Anne's clothes, and cooking Miss Anne's food and raising Miss Anne's children, too. She got sick to her stomach every time that Miss Anne's prissy little nine year old would call her "girl" ('cause Ma was only almost fifty), but she would smile and say yes ma'am, 'cause that was her job, her expected place.

But We Didn't Know

And Ma went like clockwork, five days a week, from six in the morning 'til sundown, and never complained when Mr. Joe asked her to stay late to serve a dinner party, even though Ma had a family of her own, waiting for her to come home and cook for us.

But We Didn't Know

And we was young and didn't really understand what Ma went through, 'cause she didn't let on. She just came home humming "All My Trials Lord, Soon'll Be Over." And we couldn't understand that that song and such others gave her strength and relief, and that believing that the Almighty would one day right this wrong was the only thing that kept her going; 'cause the twenty-five dollars she got a week from Mr. Joe and Miss Anne sure didn't give her much to look forward to.

But We Didn't Know

And it didn't make no difference if the weather was bad, or if Ma's veins in her legs was hurting or if her back was aching

from all those days before. She pressed anyway. 'Cause with that twenty-five dollars (in those days) she could buy a little food, pay on the layed away clothes, and maybe send us to a movie on Saturday, to get us out of the way so she could clean her own house, and cook her Sunday supper, and iron our church clothes and school clothes for the week.

But We Didn't Know

And so it went through the early years, 'til Ma got sick and couldn't work for Mr. Joe and Miss Anne no more. Then we started to find out. "Money don't grow on trees, you know." And things started getting pretty bad, 'til Pop (from some place, I don't rightly remember) started sending a few dollars here and there to help us "get back on our feet". But wasn't no getting on our feet 'cause Ma upped and died. And now she don't scrub and she don't iron and she don't cry in the night 'cause she don't know what tomorrow will bring. Now she waits in peace for the judgement when she will rest in the bosom of Abraham like the songs say. And all her trials are over. And all us kids are grown now and we don't scrub floors for nobody but ourselves. But we give thanks to the Good Lord for Ma, 'cause because of her life. . .

Now We Know

CRY OF THE HOMELESS

DEANNA TREECE

Do you know of the hours
That lurk behind tears
Wept in vain,
In frustration, in pain?
Do you care?

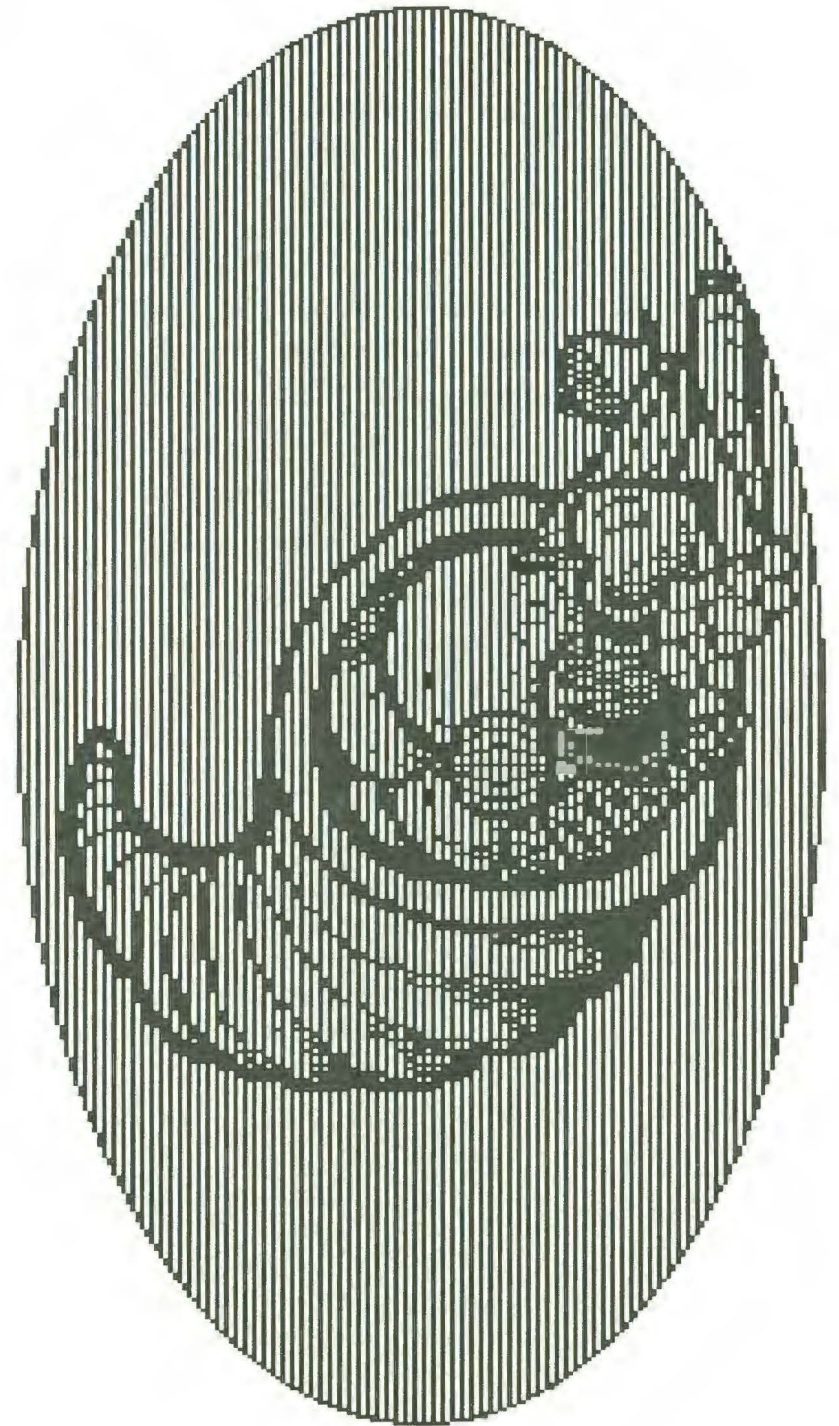
Do you know of dreams
That hold no promise,
Seek solace in anger,
Find no consolation, no requiter?
Do you care?

Do you know the heart can die
And the life still live
To romance death,
Pray relief, curse birth?
Do you care?

Do you know of me
And how I came to be
Who I am?
Do you ever wonder,
Or do you care?

Do you know of you
And what accrues
To your lot?
Do you ever deny you,
Or do you care?

Do you ever fear
The coming years
Will unfold a story
Befit an allegory?
Will you then know of fret,
Of hopeless regret,
Or will you care?



UNTITLED

JENNIFER FLESNER

Confidence, she said. What is confidence? Is it real? Is it possible? Sometimes I feel like a bird sitting safely on a branch — trying to gather the courage for flight. Can I do it? Or will I fall, broken, trampled by the competition and ruthlessness of life. I must try or forever there will be that “Could I have done it?” I must be brave and spread my wings. Just a short hop for now. Just to that little branch moments away.

WHEN I DIE

CUONG NGUYEN

When I die
Take my body to the sea,
The wind blowing rapidly
The waves moving swiftly
A thousand miles away
My body drifting toward the East.
Oh, Vietnam, Vietnam, my beloved country
I'll die on my mother's land.

CANDLE WAX TEARS

CHARLES VINCENT MCCOWEN

It seems like the tears
 of this candle are real.
I wonder if someday
 it knows how I feel?
The flame is like a love
 which is dying too fast,
And destiny knows;
 the candle can't last.
I'll light another flame
 as this one dies,
And the tears of the first
 will soon be dry.
But the vessel which held it
 will remember through the years.
For it is marked by the flow
 of candle wax tears.

GOING HOME

SHEILA GEIST

"... Honey, there ain't nothin' left ... I just can't do it anymore," he whispered with a fading sigh.

Sitting on the edge of a rusty, time-worn brush hog beneath the massive twisted limbs of an age-old pecan tree, — limbs so heavy with age, they dip down to kiss the earth — he stares out across cracked, sun-baked fields. These fields once teaming with life, filled with towering stalks of corn, blood-red tomatoes and dew-dipped melons, now lie empty. There exists a deathly stillness — no buzzing bees to sip sweet nectar, nor flies to devour decaying fruits.

Theodore Roosevelt Williams, or "Dutch" as he is known by friends, was a truck farmer. Now, at age 85, his morning glory blue eyes see only barren fields. Old, and suffering from cancer, he is unable, but not unwilling, to hitch-up "Molly," his 28-year-old lopp-eared, chestnut colored mule, to disk and plow the once fertile fields. Molly loves Dutch. She devotedly stands next to him like an old faithful hound dog. Molly doesn't like anyone but Dutch. If you come too close to her, she'll kick you as hard as her rickety old legs are able — but not Dutch. She nuzzles his ear affectionately and loyally wobbles behind him when he walks — for there is no harness, and there is no plow — no reason to walk before him.

Dutch never attended school and never learned to read or write. Nor, did he ever marry and have a family — but occasionally, he talks of a red-haired woman who could plow a field as good as any man — a strong woman, with soft blue eyes.

Although Dutch has had no formal schooling, he is still a wily old codger. Snickering, he recalls coming home from the market twenty years ago, tired and weary. Unwilling to unload the empty crates from the back of his truck, he would hide watermelons or candy in the truck bed next to the cab and then tell his young great-nieces that he had a present for them. However, unfortunately for the youngsters, they would have to unload the entire truck to reap their reward.

Dutch was born on this farm around 85 years ago. No one knows precisely when he was born because he has no birth

SHEILA GEIST

certificate. The only document of birth that exists is a faded quill-scribbled entry in an old family bible that reads, "Theodore Roosevelt Williams, born November 28, 1903." But Dutch doesn't care when he was born. The date means nothing to him. Since he cannot read or write, he doesn't know what month, day, or year it is — and frankly, could care less. The only thing that worries Dutch is being alone. Several years ago, three men broke into his run-down little house and robbed him and his handicapped nephew at gun point. All they had between the two of them was about \$23— the gutter-snipes took it! Even now, the mere thought of the harrowing experience fades his gentle blue eyes into grey. Weakly, he stammers, "I couldn't do nothin' but watch ... they held me as the other S-- 0- B--- hit poor Bubba in the face with the gun ... and him in a wheelchair ... we told them they could have what ever we had ... they never caught the bastards!" A few months later, Bubba died from a stroke leaving Dutch completely alone. Earnestly, he warns me, "Honey, you gotta marry a good man, and have lots of babies ... you gotta have someone to take care of you when you're old like me." Besides a few nieces and great-nieces, there's no one left for Dutch — no wife — no children — no friends — no one. His only regret is never having married — his only fear, "... is dying alone."

With trembling arms he slowly lifts his heavily aging body and wobbles down the parched turn-row. Hesitantly, he turns and wanders into the dilapidated old barn that he and his father built seventy some years ago — Its weatherworn wrinkled boards turned grey over years of lashing winter rains. Its rusty tin roof turned burnt sienna-orange over years of blistering summer suns. Once inside, the feeble floors creek and groan with every painful step. Like open slats of louvered shades, daylight gleams through rhythmic slits in the dark rotting walls, and incandescent flecks of dust waltz in sunbeam colonnades, with cobweb curtains draped from beam to beam, like gossamer spectral shrouds. Long forgotten kernels of oat sprout emerald green tufts in fertile crags

and crevices — a humble accolade of life to praise past memories.

As if conducting a tour, Dutch meanders through this ramshackled earthy crypt — the skeletal remains of his life's accomplishments — describing in vivid detail, every colt, calf and kitten born onto the soft, mucky hay of a once busy nursery.

In the distance, an angered bird cries in discontent. Perhaps to sound a shrill alarm . . . or to mock the banshee's wail.

TILL MORNING

DONA HATCH

It's a strange time-
an early/late mix,
an evening/morning mix?

Which is it
when the moon and the sun are both in view?

It's dark and quiet,
a twilight time
somewhere between yesterday and today.

As I read,
planting the seeds for what I will need tomorrow,
I drift...to thoughts of you.

You are there,
unaware
of being on my mind.

The stars slip away,
the sun is now the focus,

and I smile,

for soon you will be my sun
when my day fades away.

NO, DON'T GET UP

LORENZO THOMAS

I watched her throw
Her ribbons on the floor
She put her foot down.
I asked her, as she turned
Toward the door
"Where will you go?"
"Crazy," she answered
"And I insist on driving myself."

ARE YOU THERE?

CHRISTINE ROGERS

Life is all,
except the mad loneliness hidden inside.
The tunnel is dark,
a tiny light peeks through;
Are you there?

DIAMOND

JENNIFER BAKER

man
strong, brave
fighting, demanding, compelling
battles, competition; pearls, lace
captivation, alluring, enchanting
fragile, delicate
woman

tree
tall, erect
standing, towering, dominating
branch, bark; bulb, stem
blooming, beautifying, fluttering
attractive, gay
flower

infinity
eternal, measureless
unending, immense, undetermined
space, size; time, boundary
restricted, confining, cramped
finite, terminates
limit



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