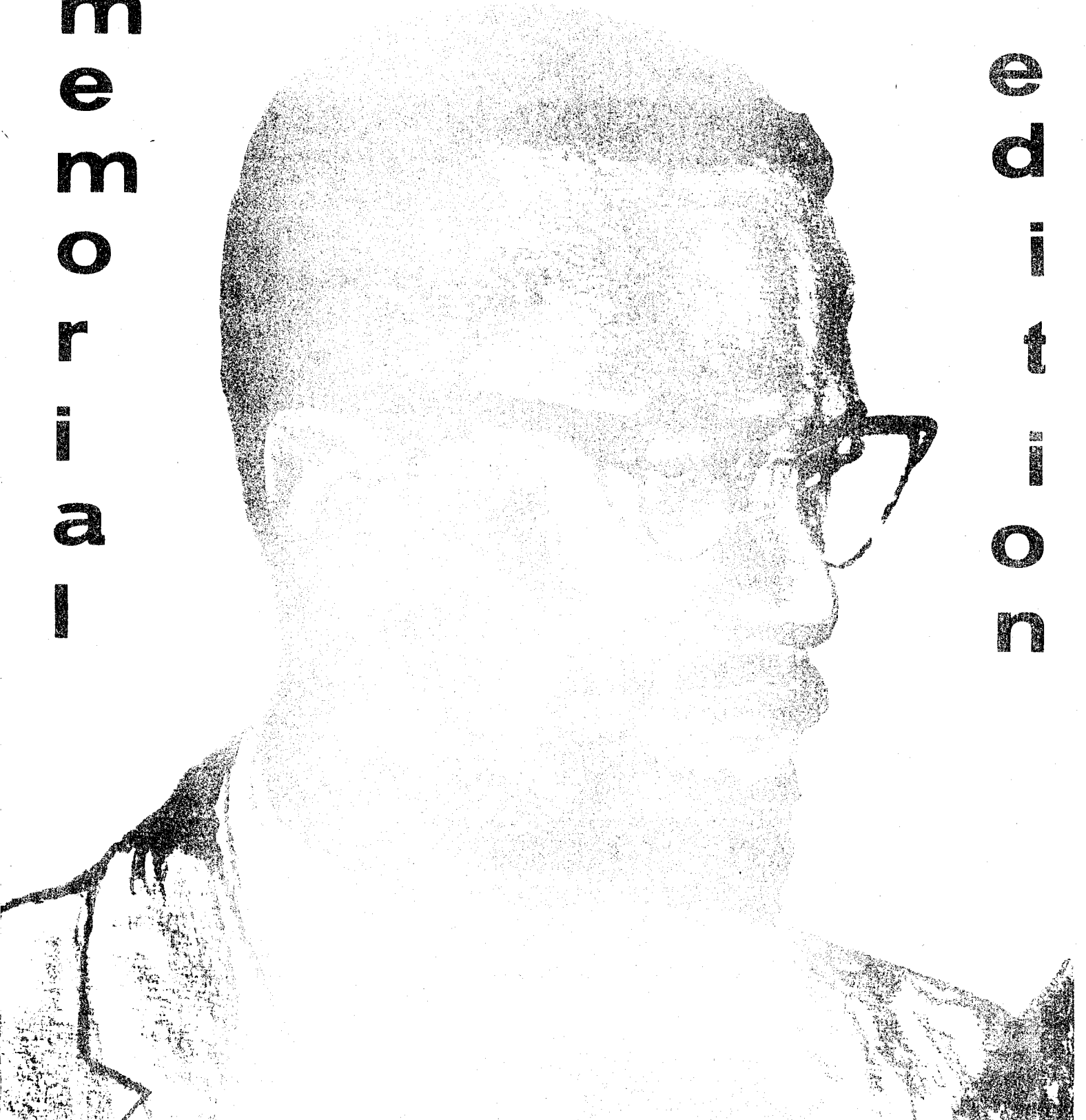


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Death doesn't come to Truth as it does to most things, but like the phoenix, Truth rises from its ashes, stronger and more beautiful than before.

On February 21, 1965 death stilled the voice of El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X). Since that fateful Sunday in New York, the unequivocal truths of his teachings have inspired and influenced the minds of Black men and women throughout the world; instilling new pride of enormous dimensions; blacking men's souls with his veracious word.

The Afro-American Club of Suffolk University in Boston reveres the memory of Malik El-Shabazz and to insure an enduring memorial dedicates the following collection of Black literature, written by members of the Club, to his precious memory.

The Editor

Afro-American Club Officers:

Norma Young, President
Sheryl Boone, Vice President
Lourdes Neely, Secretary
Earl Carrick, Treasurer
Daniel G. Queen, Public Relations
Terrance H.E. Purnell, Editor

iambo

Due to the change in the frequency of club meetings*, the Afro-Drumbeat has undergone a change of policy and direction. Beginning with this Malcolm X Memorial Edition the Drumbeat will become a monthly magazine of news, information and creative writing. The magazine will be published on or about the 15th of each month and any contributions should be submitted at least seven days prior.

In the past, the Drumbeat was a newsletter mainly concerned with reporting the happenings at meetings and around the club. The NEW AFRO-DRUMBEAT will try to be a reflection of the Black Experience and more than just another student newsletter. We know we'll have the cooperation of all Black students interested in sharing their Black Experiences.

T.H.E. Purnell, Editor

* At the first meeting of the second semester club President James Moody proposed that the club meet semi-monthly instead of weekly. The suggestion was adopted and put into effect. Norma Young is acting President during brother Jim's student-teaching schedule.

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BLACK DOORWAY

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BLACKHEART

(To El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz)

Sad, frustrated

Few friends

Among his people

Backs are turned.

His thoughts are

Evilly perverse,

Revolutionary

Black

T.H.E. Purnell

daniel G. queen

AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT

CHRISTMAS SUCKS AND SANTA CLAUS IS A FAGGOT. The snow was coming down lightly and the city was quieting after almost two months of buying-mania. Some people were out at the few remaining open stores buying their last few presents while others were picking up their fifths and half-gallons of booze. Children all over the city were preparing for bed, everyone, that is, except 12 year-old Joel Wilson who was roaming the streets endlessly writing on walls, windows and hallways. FUCK A BUNCH OF WISEMEN he wrote on the window of Jordan Marsh as he peeped in at the nativity setting on display. It was Christmas eve.

Christmas had always had a "special" meaning for Joel as far back as he could remember. There was the time when he received a lousy Mickey Mouse comic book. And the time when his mother explained so beautifully that Santa wouldn't be visiting that year. But that didn't stop her from buying a new fur coat with the welfare check. He also remembered the time when he was the only kid in the projects without even a tree. Christmas was no big deal for Joel. In fact, each year he hoped that Santa Claus would die so that no-one would receive anything. But it never happened and once again he had to suffer the loneliness and rejection of being left out.

DANCER AND PRANCER ARE WINOS AND RUDOLPH IS A JUNKIE. It wasn't very cold out but a light snow was falling and Joel's sneakers were getting wet. It wasn't any fun writing on walls this year anyhow.

Back at the third floor apartment in the projects that Joel reluctantly called home, Ruby Wilson was busy trying to apply make-up, spray her afro-wig, and get dressed at the same time. She was a waitress down at the Moon Glow Cafe and Christmas eve was no excuse for being late or taking a night off, not that she ever thought about taking a night off anyway. Ruby was usually the first waitress at the club every night. The place wasn't very much but to Ruby it was home. "Joel honey," she said// as the boy entered the door, "I hope you understand why Santa won't be coming again this year. If that no good father of yours would just send us some money once in a while we could celebrate Christmas, you could have the clothes you need, and I wouldn't have to work all the time. But you just wait, we gonna be on our feet pretty soon and momma will buy you the shiniest pair of shoes and the biggest set of trains you ever seen."

Shit, Joel thought to himself, she made those same fucking promises last year and the year before. Always blaming the father he never knew. Always complaining how she worked so hard to support the son she let walk the snowy streets in sneakers while she wore expensive-looking clothes and fancy leather boots. I seen those checks he sends her and the ones from the welfare office. If she didn't drink and dope it up so much we'd probably have enough money for a bunch of Christmases. "Ya know Joel honey," she said/ interrupting his thoughts, "I been thinking. You're almost old enough to start selling papers and shining shoes.

You'll be 13 in January and as big as you are it would be easy. And maybe we could have a real Christmas next year. How 'bout that honey?" "O.K. momma." So now I gotta pay for my own fucking Christmas he thought to himself. SLAM!!! Snow or no snow anything was better than listening to her run off at the mouth.

Down around the rapid transit terminal there were a number of small clubs supported entirely by the Black community and owned entirely by the white community. The projects were only about a half-mile away and Joel enjoyed walking in that area digging on the hip brothers and slick sisters. It was almost like a circus he thought with a smile, even though he had never been to one. There were lots of colors and strange clothes and in his mind, this was what the circus must be all about. Yellow and red jumpsuits; green, purple and pink shoes; white, red and gold hats; orange knickers; white fur coats; red afro-wigs and blonde wigs with Shirley Temple curls; leopard skin mini skirts; and harlequin boots.

A few of the older guys around the joints knew Joel. Ruby Wilson was more than a waitress and any number of young and old men on the corner could tell you so. Many of the guys came to the house while the boy was home and his was a well-known face down around the terminal area. Tonight everyone was either too high or drunk or too busy buying their stash for the holiday to notice the youngster. Like many of his friends, Joel had smoked reefer on several occasions. One day, he dreamed, he would be the big man on the corner selling smoke, coke, heroin and women. I'll show her what Christmas should be, he mused.

"Say boy, why aren't you home at this time of night waiting for brother Claus to lay a load of heavy trinkets on you." The voice belonged to a slick-looking brother wearing a black and white jumpsuit, black and white shoes, a black maxi-fur coat with white trim, and forty pounds of black and silver afro-wig. The brother's name was Eddie and Joel had seen him around the house several times. "That old fat honkie ain't gonna leave me shit and I got better things to do with my time," he replied. "Well dig this little brother, I'm gonna lay ten big ones on you cause you're my man, dig it? Here, take this nickel bag too and get your head together. Joel put the ten dollar bill and the smoke into his back pocket and held back the tears which were begining to build up in his eyes. It had been a long time since anyone had given him anything for Christmas. "By the way little brother is your old lady home?" Joel nodded. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "Good, brother Charlie and I will give you a ride home. Gotta check some stuff with your old lady." Joel wasn't really planning to head home for some time, but the thought of riding in Eddie's purple, gold and white Cadillac Eldorado with fur upholstery made him change his mind quickly. Seeing and even touching such a car was a thrill for Joel and his friends, but riding in one was sheer ecstasy. Every tooth in his mouth was showing as he grinned all the way home. Tomorrow he would be a big man in the projects once this story got around.

Ruby Wilson had received a phone call from one of her "steady customers" and went out to take care of a little business before checking in at the Moon Glow.

When no one answered the door, Joel feeling very much like a man, pulled out his key and invited the brothers to come in and smoke some of "my stuff" while they waited. The three went into the living room, turned on the stereo, dimmed the lights and started smoking. Joel's stuff didn't last very long but Eddie had an ounce in one of his pockets and the smoking continued. The young boy was already higher than he had ever been in his life but he was in the company of "big timers" and had to keep it up to show them how "hip" he was. Midnight came fast and at the sound of the chiming bells Eddie suggested that they try some "heavier stuff" and asked the kid if he could take it. Once again, Joel felt that he was being tested by the big-timers and nodded that he was game for anything. After all, he reasoned, it was Christmas and having ten dollars was worth celebrating about.

He stifled the cry of pain that he wanted to blurt out as the needle pierced his arm. In a few seconds he began to feel kind of funny and the sounds of the stereo became jumbled bits of music in his ears. Soon the sounds unbearably loud. He tried to drown the sounds by putting his hands up to his ears but that didn't work and only drew loud laughter from Eddie and Charlie. He saw visions of Santa Claus and reindeer and Christmas trees and presents with his name. Eddie and Charlie began to take notice as "the kid" laughed uncontrollably. All of a sudden he lay silent on the floor. "Poor kid had a little too much," Eddie said nervously trying to hide his fear. "Guess we better leave before his old lady gets home," Charlie replied, equally nervous and anxious. "He'll be o.k. in the morning." "Yeah, dig that, let's split." SLAM!!!

The stiff little body lay in the middle of the living room for hours. Drunken laughter filled the air as the door opened and Ruby Wilson stumbled in with a pudgy middle-aged white man. She looked at her son laying on the living room floor and smiled. "Poor kid, Christmas has never been much for him. Maybe I'll take tomorrow off and take him out somewhere. Yeah, that'll make him happy. He's had a rough life, and after all, it isn't his fault he's here." She bends over and covers her son with the fur coat while her companion slipped a five into one of the boy's pockets. The two then stepped over the curled figure and headed for the bedroom.....

negro

T.H.E. Furnell

Sleeping children
dreaming myopic dreams of whiteness
waking to the blackness of daybreak
crying.

nothing is forever, everlasting
even death is for change
therefore, love whomever and happily
and live wherever and happily
both until
the time has come for change

T.H.E. Farnell

daniel G. queen

THE TIES THAT BIND

You couldn't really see the singing group on the stage from the small table in the far left corner of the club, but where else would a guy sit in a nightclub with another man's wife. Anyway, just hearing the sweet sounds of harmonizing voices blending with soothing musical melodies was an entertainment delight in itself. The Blue Moon was a small nightclub on the outskirts of the Black community's combat zone district. Since most Blacks in the community frequented the downtown white establishments and suburban motels, it was one of the safest places to entertain a woman without running into friends, neighbors and husbands. The entertainment was better than average and the high cover charge reflected it. The atmosphere was one of dim red lights and thick smoke screens sent up by cigarette and reefer smokers. Whites slumming in the "ghetto", middle-class Negroes soaking in another week's supply of "soul" and just plain entertainment freaks filled the club.

The Moon, as it was called, was a somewhat unusual club in that its semi-plush red and black decor and very attractive waitresses were rare in that section of town. The oval drinking bar was situated in the front of the club facing the stage at the other end of the room. Huge pillars, wall and ceiling hangings and sound equipment obstructed the view of customers on either side of the stage. It was almost impossible to see anyone on the stage from the far corners, but then, it was almost impossible to be seen in the far corners.

The Moon was David's favorite sneaking joing and tonight he was with his favorite sneaking partner. To be truthful, though, Dottie was more than just another extra-marital affair. He had been going out with her for seven months and whether he would admit it to anyone or even himself, he was in love with her. Maybe it was the result of his own unsuccessful marriage, maybe it was because the two of them were unhappy and needed each other, maybe it was her impishly sexy smile, maybe it was the longing look in her eyes, or maybe it was the total atmosphere of sensuality that she created with her presence. Whatever it was, David was attracted to Dottie in a way that he had never been to any other woman in his life. He thought about her almost every minute of every day, at work, at home, at night school or during bowling on Tuesday nights. He thought about the irony of loving a woman who would never be his and living with a woman who he didn't love but would probably always be with. He thought about the day when they would finally have to part. But most of all he thought about the weekend they spent in Montreal.

For four days they just layed around the hotel swimming, drinking, smoking reefer and making love. It was more than just a weekend, it was an experience, an experience of a lifetime shared with the woman he loved. Listening to the music with a fixed gaze on the wall, he could see her slender delicate body gliding through the water and then laying lazily beside the pool. He followed the contours of soft moist skin laying on the bed, illuminated only by the light from the television. Dottie placed her hand over his and he was back in the Moon. Anyway, he thought, she was here with him tonight and he could always daydream at the job on Monday. It was Friday night and he wanted to make the most of her company, as he did every time they were able to see each other. They sat there for several hours staring into each others eyes, exchanging smiles and making small talk. He would take her home early tonight since they would be going up to a motel in New Hampshire tomorrow afternoon. That was on both their minds right now.

Sitting with Dottie had made David forget that he had wanted to hear the group singing now for several months. But being with her often made him forget other things that he wanted to do. Reality was a nightmare and when he wasn't getting high he was daydreaming. Right now he was staring into her dark brown eyes which sparkled like new glass. She gave him that smile which always melted his heart and once again his mind wandered back to Montreal. He thought of the seemingly endless hours that they layed there in each others arms, making love and being in love. He thought about her scratching his back and biting his ears, neck and shoulders.

Then he thought about what life would eventually become without her and shuddered. Truth, he thought, that's what life is all about. And wasn't love the purest form of truth. Why should they have to hide the truth they found in each other? Why should two pieces of paper prevent their happiness? After all, isn't marriage, like government, an unnatural social contract devised by man.

Four drinks, two hundred smiles and ten mental lapses later the final show came to an end and it was last call for drinks before the club closed in a half hour. David wasn't much of a drinker but Dottie wanted one more gin sour before going home to face the man with whom she was forced to share a bed. She was less happy in her marriage than David and only the thought of her four children eased the pain. Her old man was a big strong meat-packer who too often resorted to physical violence to resolve arguments at home or in the street. She couldn't count the number of times he beat her for spending too much money, fixing dinner late or just coming in an hour or so later than she was supposed to. Long before she had started seeing David, Ben had beat her just because he suspected something was going on behind his back. She knew that he had been running around town with several women, but the mere mention of it in his presence always started an argument which resulted in more bruises. She had tried to get him to agree to a separation or divorce many times but that only got her beat again. David was the love of her life but the two of them would never be together. But she always hoped.

They were the last couple to leave the club and the street was almost empty when they got outside. David's car was around the corner on a dark side-street. Just as they turned the corner a huge black figure stepped out of the shadows. Dottie clenched David's hand firmly and then released it all in one motion. It was Ben. "Caught you this time tramp and you gonna remember whose wife you are. I ain't got nothing against you dude, so you better get going and leave me and my wife to settle this thing alone." David knew that Ben would beat Dottie as soon as he was gone. He tried to avoid the tearfully pleading look in her eyes. She was Ben's wife and there was nothing he could do about it he thought as he headed for the car. He heard a loud slap and a sharp scream as he pulled from the curb with tears in his eyes. After all, he reasoned, she is his wife.

Back at the apartment David tried to drink and smoke himself into oblivion. He got through a pint of straight ~~XXXXXX~~ bourbon and was smoking his fifth joint when he passed out on the bed. Anyway, she is his wife, he sobbed before nodding out. Saturday morning was a nightmare. Ruth, his wife, brought him the morning paper as he lay in bed suffering from a drunk-high. The Bruins and Lakers won again he mused flipping half-heartedly through the sports pages. Today is a good day for scorpions he noted after reading the daily horoscope column. Maybe Dottie would finally leave her husband after last night's fight. Maybe they could still make it to New Hampshire. After all, she understood that he couldn't come between her and her husband.

Then the shock. In a small clipping buried down on page 13 the headline read: Roxchester Man Beats Wife to Death.

"Ben Wilson, 32, of 167 Chandler St. in Roxchester ~~XXXXXXXX~~ confessed to the brutal murder of his wife Dottie, 25. The woman's badly bruised body was found by police early this morning ~~XXXXXXXX~~ in an alley behind the Blue Moon nightclub. When arrested at his home at four a.m. Wilson admitted to beating his wife outside the club after finding her with another man not yet identified. He claimed that she just fell limp after he hit her in the head and she collided with the brick building."

The paper dropped from David's hands as the tears swelled in his eyes. "There was nothing I could do," he sobbed, "she was his wife. A man's got a right to beat his wife. She was his wife. There was nothing I could do. She knew that. I loved her. She knew that. There was nothing I could do. She was his wife." But no matter how many times he repeated it there was a feeling inside him that said he was wrong. He should have stood by her regardless of the consequences. Wasn't that what truth and love were all about. He betrayed himself and now there was no more truth in life for there was no more love. Like truth, you can only achieve love once, he thought. All else is imitation. Dottie was gone now and so was the truth in the love they had found.

The fire escape was the coolest spot in town in the summer. David often spent long hours reading and writing essays and poetry there. Now in February it was more than cool as the temperature ran in the mid-twenties. ~~XX~~ A crowd was beginning to gather below to look up at the nut sitting on the handrail of the iron structure on the tenth floor. "He's going to jump," a woman screamed. "Naw, he's just jivin'," a young brother exclaimed. "I got five beans saying the brother is sure'nuff for real," a mod-dressed man cried. "My Abe Lincoln has got you covered, bro," another brother shouted back. While the betting and confusion was going on below, David smiled to himself. What do they know, he thought, about love, life, truth and beauty. No one will ever really know what my life was all about. They couldn't care less what I'm doing up here and why. And Ruth, if she was only half the woman that Dottie was. Montreal. Now that was life. That was truth and beauty and love. I have been lucky enough to have experienced truth, I have been to the mountain top. And now its time to go down, he thought, just before he leaned over and feel to his death. The crowd gathered for a brief moment and then began dispersing as the police arrived. A young man with a wide-brimmed fur hat and matching maxi-coat bent over and picked up the five dollar bill. "Sure'nuff for real," he said, stuffing the bill into his pocket and walking away,....

recipe for BLACK

Take blue
add a little red and
a pinch of green.

T.H.E. Purnell

Part One

Ruby wiped perspiration from her forehead as she entered Les Crawley's General Store. A snicker followed by a loud guffaw came from the group of Crawley's friends who hung around Saturday afternoons to chew tobacco and "the fat". Their smiling faces turned toward Ruby Wilson who put her hand on her daughter's shoulder to calm both herself and pretty Cheryl. Ruby didn't want to come into town today but Sam, her husband, was adamant. Everything must appear normal he told her and Saturday was shopping day. The conversation in the store had ended with the laughter and now the men who were surrounding the counter near the dry goods watched Ruby and her 13 year old daughter as they walked toward the counter they had polished with their elbows. Ruby had seen these men before. With the exception of the Sheriff Jake, and the red-haired Crawley, they were farmers from thereabout who like the Wilson family came to town only when they needed store bought goods. Neither Ruby nor Cheryl showed their nervousness as they headed directly toward Crawley. It was understandable that the men couldn't help but ogle the women after being in the country sometimes for months at a time, seeing no one nor anything of beauty except nature, and even that was tainted by pollution; it was natural that they would stare at Ruby who at 37 years was as beautiful as she was at twenty. Her black face smooth of blemishes, her supple body still evident beneath the modest clothes she wore. Her hair worn naturally, like fine textured wool, crowning her beautiful person like a soft black halo over the most holy.

And Cheryl was a miniature of her mother. At thirteen she possessed the body of a well endowed woman with the same facial beauty of her mother. Her hair was parted in the middle with a pony of hair on each side tied by red ribbons. She filled the a red and white blouse and blue dungarees amply. The group of farmers divided to allow the African queens to pass.

Ruby looked at Cheryl's tight pants and wished again that she hadn't had to bring her along. But Sam had assured her that nothing would happen in the day time and whereas Cheryl always accompanied her on Saturdays he wanted everything to look as normal as possible.

The coarse smells of chewing tobacco, whiskey and body odor in this corner of the store nearly obliterated the smells of the fruits and vegetables that ~~xxx~~ were piled nearby.

The brown smile from Les Crawley's tobacco-stained mouth was meant for his friends as ~~xxxx~~ his eyes went in their direction. He avoided Ruby's eyes as he asked what he could do for her. His eyes went from Ruby's bosom to Cheryl's, remaining for a long while, savoring the beauty of her ~~body~~ young body laced with the sweet sauce of innocence. Ruby eyed Crawley and his gaping, leering friends and quickly told him her order. Coffee, spices and fruit. Things hadn't changed much for folks in this part of the country, supermarkets were part of city life, here in the country folks had to come to the general store for the things that they couldn't grow.

The men were silently watching the two women as they tried to cover their nervousness by browsing around.

Crawley never took his eyes off Cheryl as she helped her mother put the fruit within his reach on the counter. Ruby never really took her mind off Crawley. She could see what her husband meant when he told her that Les Crawley and his kind's hankering for Black women could only grow stronger because they had never been made to pay any dues. They only had to take what they wanted and answer no questions for they were the law and order.

As Cheryl put the last of the apples and oranges on the counter Crawley lifted an apple from the pole and tossed it in the air with his right hand and caught it with his left to amuse her. Then with a wink to his cronies, he offered it to Cheryl who stepped back a couple of feet nervously. Ruby cringed but controlled herself. Take the apple from Mr. Crawley she advised Cheryl in a voice as pleasant as she could make it.

Tears welled in Ruby's eyes as Cheryl reached for the apple, for at the same moment Crawley reached his free arm around Cheryl's waist snatching the startled girl toward him. Ruby's ears were burning as she watched Crawley press her daughter's body against his own under the guise of being playful. The watching men were aroused as they watched the girl's writhing body struggling to be released. Jake the sheriff turned red as he wet his lips with his tongue. The eyes of the sod busters danced in their sockets.

Crawley jumped as the dusty display of canned okra fell from the counter into the tomatoes in the basket on the floor at the counter front where Ruby was standing. He released the frightened girl and rushed toward the tomatoes and Ruby, demanding to know what the hell was going on.

Ruby filled the air with apologies as she tenderly drew her ~~fr~~ frightened child under her arm, explaining to Crawley how the terrible accident had happened. Not much damage had been done, a split tomato and a couple of bruised ones, so his rage calmed ~~him~~ to irritation. He gruffly asked what else she wanted, adding that the cost of tomatoes would ~~go~~ up if "you people" kept damaging the property. He didn't notice Ruby's eyes, steeled and unflinching as she ~~asked~~ asked for four boxes of shotgun shells. He was busy tightening his belt and sticking his shirt in his pants.

Outside, Ruby gently took the apple that Cheryl still clutched in her trembling hands and threw it in the gutter. She wiped her forehead with her handkerchief and calmed herself with the consolation that that would be the last time that Crawley's crusty hands would touch her baby.

Part 2

Three sharp reports from a twenty-two rifle came from the woods in back of Sam Wilson's house. Two cola cans fell from a fallen pine tree trunk, leaving one can standing in the clearing where Sam and his son Thomas were. Sam watched his son reloading his weapon hastily forcing the cartridges into the sleeve. Take your time son, don't be in such a hurry. "Take your time and squeeze the trigger. See what happens when you pull, you jerk the whole rifle and it don't take much to miss everything." Thomas had the rifle loaded now and was ready to start firing at the remaining can when his father stopped him. That's enough for now son, go on in the house and clean and oil the rifles like I taught you. Having a dirty rifle son is as bad as not knowing how to use one. The rifle can't do nobody no good if it don't work right. Go on in now son and tell your mama I'm going for some wood and will be there in a bit. He followed the trail from the clearing to a smaller one where the woodpile was located, thinking of how he felt just now knowing that this was one of the last time he would see this path he had walked as a child, the trees he had climbed, the woodpile smelling of freshly chopped pine and probably most of all seeing the beautiful view of the sky from here at nightfall.

A enormous, red sun had infected the entire western sky by the time Sam arrived at the wood pile. He picked up an ax and chopped enough to fill the wood bin in the kitchen, then he sat and looked at the rose colored sky and trees which encircled the small clearing. Everything was red. Even the blades of grass which were about in red clumps.

Red, he thought. He knew about red. Red is a royal color. Black folks are crazy about red, so they say. Ruby looked especially fine in red, but Ruby looked fine in most anything. Red, blood red was what he saw everytime he saw Les Crawley or any of those bastards Crawley ran with. Blood was red and he knew about blood too. He remembers the blood on Joe Rackley's son's head that night they came and took Rackley's daughter Iris. Forth of July and everyone was celebrating, at least everyone white was celebrating. Blacks had learned that on certain holidays in this area, it was best to turn off all the lights and go to bed carly. Locking your door was a meaningless precaution.

Icy cold enveloped his chest whenever he remembered Joe, delirious and beside himself with fear, sitting in Sam's kitchen crying as he explained how they had come into his house earlier, drunk and sweaty, and took his thirteen year old daughter Iris, still clad in pajamas, from her bed despite the begging and pleading of him and his wife Sara. The older son James was beaten unconcious with ~~the~~ a shotgun some one had bought in, just in case. Yeh, red flowed from that boy's head like a water fall over the bridge of his nose. He almost died that evening, from loss of blood. Joe was scared to death. Fear for his daughter, family and last and perhaps least, fear for himself, stopped Joe dead. Neighbors had come to comfort Sara who was grief stricken. Sam was at the Rackley house when they brought Iris home. The Johnsons ~~came~~ from down the road a few miles had found her in ^{the} woods behind their pig pen. She was unconcious, shock Dock Mills said. Yeh, Sam knew about red and

blood. Tears ran down his cheeks as he recalled, when he saw the child. It could have been his own daughter Cheryl laying there, he had reasoned, laying there red from the waist down. Sam was in a controlled rage for weeks after this incident. Joe Rackley wouldn't say who was responsible for his daughter's assault. Joe said that enough damage had had been done and that it would be better to forgive and forget. He was content that his family was alive, after all it could have been worse, thank God it wasn't. Sara said that it was God's will and God worked in mysterious ways. Mysterious? Sam thought ruthless was a better word.

Funny thing about the country though, word travels faster than a forest fire. Les Crawley was the word. Les Crawley, storekeeper and rapist.

Sam picked up an armfull of wood and headed toward home. Red rhymed with dead he thought, and me and my family would be both red and dead before Les Crawley or anybody else lay a hand on a Wilson. When they came to knock on our door they came to stay. If God was into punishing folks for their sins then He should appreciate the help I am about to give him. I got His final reward for ol' Les Crawley, hafta give it to him early probably, Ruby bought four more boxes of final rewards today. He sank the ax deep into the chopping block, changed his mind and with both hands removed it. Might as well bring it home too he thought.

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Part 3

After supper Sam remained sitting as Cheryl removed the dishes from the table.

It was a question of dying as he saw it. He was ready to die when they sent him to Korea, to kill and die if necessary to protect America and her way of life. It was almost the same thing now, only the America and the way of life meant more. "Ruby, Cheryl and Thomas are the only America and way of life that meant anything to me and they are ~~every~~ everything. I didn't hardly need to be fighting in Korea to insure someone else a better way of life when my own family is treated like animals, at home," he thought.

Thomas finished cleaning the two shotguns and his own twenty-two and came to see what his father was doing. Sam spoke as the boy approached. "Aint gonna play with you tonight boy, I got some thinking to do. In a week it will be the Fourth and well... I'll tell you about that later too son but," he held the boy's arms and looked up into his brown eyes. He looked into his eleven year old son's long face and at his thin frame, "best boy in the world," he thought.

"What's gonna happen on the Fourth of July, daddy," The boy asked.

"We'll get to that later boy, I just want to tell you this son: You're my boy and that means You're my little man, and I depend on you. If anything should happen which I think will, around the night of the Fourth, I want you to pick up just where I left off. I don't want to crying son you may be scared as hell, but so won't your mother and Cheryl be and it will be up to you to look out for them.

You know how to shoot that rifle of yours and the shotguns too son, so just remember that I always told you and most important, don't be afraid to die son, remember the family is worth dying for. You're a good boy Tom, I love you and I'll be depending on you. Now go on and read something while I sit for a while I sit for a while." Thomas left the kitchen and Sam slipped back into his thoughts.

It was a question of dying. A coward dies a thousand deaths, they say. He felt for poor Joe and Sara Rackby. They must die a little everytime he hears a car driving up in the night, or whenever he looks at Iris' blue-eyed baby boy or whenever he looks into Les Crawley's smiling face. Poor dying, dead Joe. But just let Crawley or anyone else touch a Wilson and I'm dead, cause I'll die killing any bastard who so much as raised a finger at my family. Then me and Joe will both be dead, only they'll bury me.

Ruby came into the kitchen and lit the coffee pot. "I got the feeling honey athat it will be soon," she said. If you had seen how that bastard and his pig friends were acting today honey,"--she was glad that he hadn't seen them and knew that telling him about it in detail would only upset him more.

"Why, what did they do?" he sat up in the chair looking at her.

"It was the way they were looking at us," continued his wife, I kinda think that they may even come before the weekend."

Sam sunk back into the chair. "I don't think they will but I'll be ready if they do, sugar," he said. Ruby corrected him, "We'll be ready honey, you and me together. He put his arm around her waist as she poured a cup of coffee for him. "You know I ain't never gonna leave your side, honey.

Her hand rubbed his chest. "What happens to you happens to me, honey, we. I ain't too good with the shotgun but with these shells I bought today you don't have to be too good, you always say." She leaned over and kissed her husband's salty, tear wet lips. "You and me together, sugar," she said as her tears met his.

Part 4

Sam spent the rest of the week preparing for the weekend. This was the Fourth of July weekend. Just because the chances were that they wouldn't live long after the Fourth or whenever Crawley decided to fulfill his cravings, it was ridiculous to make it easy for them. Might as well take as many of the enemy with him, that's what they taught him in Korea. He strengthened the lower wall areas with concrete he had been saving for fence posts and worked day and night sitting the dynamite, he had planned to use to remove tree stumps from the fields with, in positions along the road and in other strategic locations around the house. Thomas and Ruby were then shown how each clump of dynamite could be ignited by hitting it with a rifle bullet. "Made no sense to lie down and die, he reminded himself many times.

Friday was the day of anticipation. From his front porch he could see the cars and trucks filled with people, country folks mostly going into town for the big Independence Day celebration. Red, white and blue banners and streamers decorated the vehicles and even a few horses had red, white and blue pennants sticking from various parts of their saddles. Sam couldn't help but think about the red, white and blue as he sat on the porch, checking and double checking his rifle. Blue, he thought. What had the blue got to do with the flag? I can understand the red well enough, after all the dying and death America was responsible for. The red his family would soon be when the State troopers came with their automatic and infra-red rifles. He looked at the shotgun laying across his legs. Blue maybe that's for how I feel now. I feel kinda sad and that's feeling blue, so they say. Yeh, maybe that's what the blue is for cause sure has

been plenty of Black folks made ~~xx~~ blue in this country. And white, well who don't know what the white is for. White was for good and everything that wasn't Black and bad like him and his people, that was easy enough.

After supper while it was still light, Sam and Thomas made the final round, checking the arrangement of the dynamite and marking each with a white stake facing the house, that could be seen in the moonlight. "After the firing starts," Sam explained, "those that get away will go straight to the Sheriff who will call the State Troopers who were in town anyway and they will have to come across the front of us and then we surprise them with the dynamite. Some will try to hide in the pine grove on the hill there, good 'cause after we hit that pile there, there won't be no more pine grove. The rest of the dynamite we'll keep in the house in case they get close enough and we can throw it on ~~xx~~ 'em.

Waiting after nightfall was torture. It was almost a relief to hear the sound of cars coming down their dirt road. "Go into the bedroom Cheryl, Thomas you too and take a shotgun with you," Sam commended. "Thomas held back the curtain in the doorway for Cheryl to enter. Sam put out all the light leaving only the lamp on the kitchen table. Ruby locked the shutters on the window peering ~~xx~~ through the slits Sam had made to look through. She saw three drunken figures coming up the path in the moonlight. "Three men, honey," she whispered to Sam who was looking out the other shutter, "one's got a gun," 'just in case' she thought.

"Stay behind that curtain Thomas and make sure that shotgun is loaded," Sam said. Ruby sat down at the table nervously holding a coffee cup. Sam carefully placed his shotgun in a shadow beside the

refrigerator. The first man to reach the door, hit it with his fist." "Sh sh," somebody joked, "you might wake them coonSup. They laughed. Another drawled, "We gonna wake 'em and shake 'em out of bed tonight." The third added quickly "Let 'em stay in bed if they want to, that will just make it easier for ~~kn~~ what I got in mind." They laughed louder, as the man with the rifle pounded the door with the rifle but.

Sam opened the door just as Les Crawley had put his shoulder to it, knocking Sam back against the refrigerator. The smell of tobacco was like it had been in the store last Saturday, only much stronger. Les Crawley spoke as the three men entered the house. "What took you so long to answer, boy?" He looked up at Sam who was three or four inches taller than him. The man with the rifle was a stranger to Sam and Ruby, the third man was the Sheriff Jake, drunk and redfaced as usual. "How Sam," Crawley said, "your little woman there and your daughter kinda owe us a debt." He smiled into Ruby's stone face. "They probably ain't told you but they damaged some property of mine the last time they were in the store and me and the boys kinda figure they ought to pay any debt they owe. Don't you think so too, Sam?" He waited for an answer. The sheriff leaned on the table, facing Ruby. With the door still open, bursts of laughter could be heard from the direction of the pine grove. A car horn blasted as the impatient men waited.

"What do we owe you," Sam asked coldly.

"Well," Crawley laughed, "well I know you all don't got much money, boy, so me and the fellas figured since the women did the damage, they can be the ones to pay. We'll take the payment out of

their hides, so to speak." Crawley laughed at his own play on words. The other intruders joined in.

Then Jake spoke quickly, "You can have the youngster if you want Les, but I'm gonna have this one here." he said as he reached across the table for Ruby, But Ruby moved like a jungle cat, jumping up and taking the wood ax from the corner behind her chair and burying it in Jake's red face, before he could pull his hand back across the table. Swinging his rifle around was the last thing the stranger did in life as a blast came from behind the curtain. His body followed his head through the door and onto the porch, leaving the doorway open to the moonlight. Crawley was white as a Klansman's sheet. He looked at Jake first, laying on the table with the ax blade protruding from his skull. He looked at Thomas standing in the bedroom doorway, pointing the still smoking barrel through the curtain, but he never saw Cheryl nor Ruby again for Sam now held the shotgun he had hid beside the refrigerator to Les's chest and squeezed the trigger.

"Ruby, keep an eye out they should be coming up here soon to see what's happening. Thomas, help me get these bodies outside," Sam ordered. The two of them dragged the corpses of Jake and Crawley outside and left them on the porch with that of the stranger. Sam took the rifle the dead man had dropped, it was one of those new pump shotguns he had always wanted. He loaded it and passed his other to Ruby. He bolted the door as the family took their positions with loaded rifles and waited for the men in the car to act. And suddenly Independence day had a new meaning for him.

a prayer

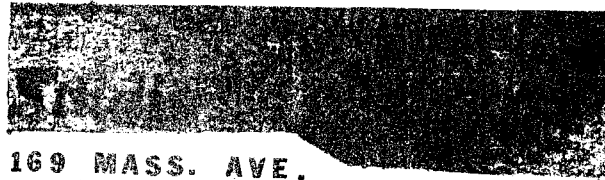
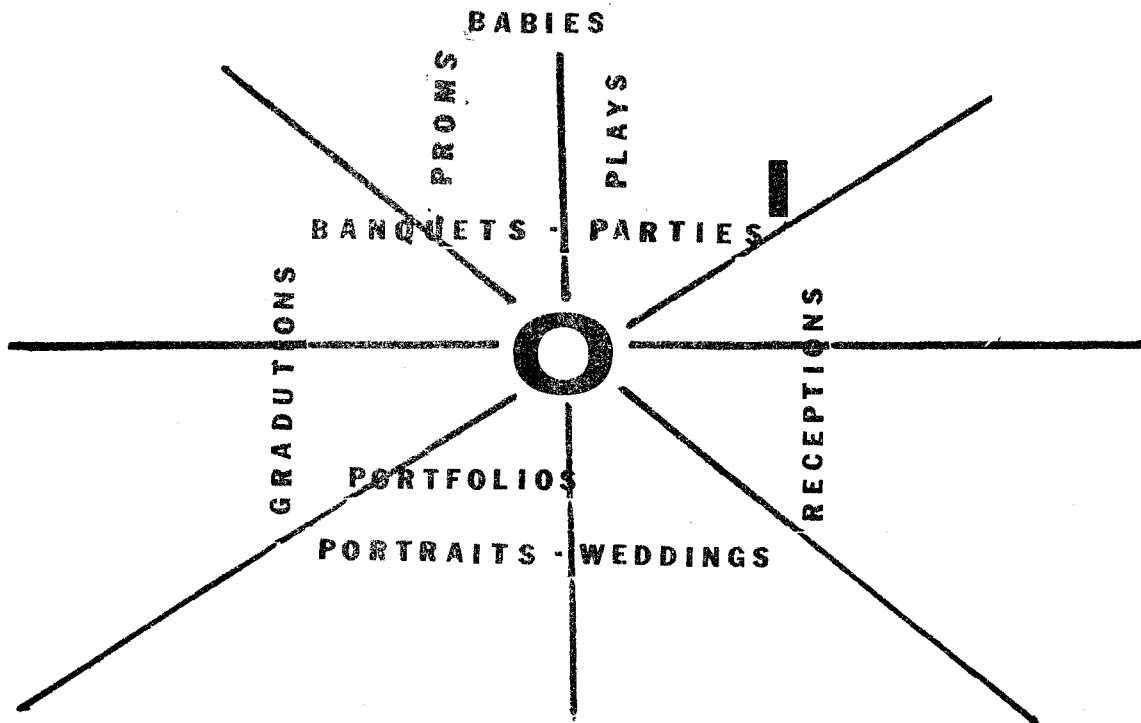
Am I the heavenly father to my son?

I pray that I am and that he sees

the face of Christ in his own reflection.

T.H.E. Purnell

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