

Bayou Review

Spring 1991

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Bayou Review is published twice a year by UH-Downtown. The magazine welcomes essay, poetry, short story, art and photography submissions from the UH-Downtown students and faculty.

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Bayou Review Contests

Bayou Review awards four \$50 prizes for winning submissions in the categories of essay, poetry, short story, and cover illustration. All student submissions are considered for the contests.

The winners for the Spring 1991 contests are:

Essay	Tommy Thomason.....	<i>Thirteen & Up</i>
Poetry	Tamara Taylor	<i>Women of the Nineties</i>
Short Story	Koga's Zero	<i>On the way to war in Kuwait</i>

The cover contest did not receive a winning entry.



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As far back as I can remember, I had two sets of friends — those who knew and those who didn't know. The first group, my real friends, lived on the same street or close by. These kids visited my brothers and me at home and knew about my house and my father and somehow were able to overlook the last part. The latter group, really just acquaintances, only saw me at school. This group never saw my house or my parents and rarely played any important roles in my life.

We lived in a large house in what probably used to be a slightly up-scale neighborhood. Many of the homes around mine would have qualified as mansions, but the grandeur of most of them was well hidden behind peeling walls, broken bricks and untidy yards. Some of the neighbors made valiant efforts to maintain their houses and yards and some accomplished this admirably, but most of the families struggled for subsistence. From the outside my house probably appeared just average, not too run down, but not valiantly maintained either.

My family lived among those struggling for subsistence, my mother playing both the roles of mother and father. She worked at a dairy for an hourly rate and, with the addition of a small pension check, provided food, clothing and shelter for my father and three boys. She went to work every Monday through Friday; I hardly ever remember her calling in sick. Every morning when my brothers and I got up for school, there would be three lunch sacks made with our names on them. These were modest lunches, usually a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a small bag of chips and a quarter for milk. We were not poor — the lunches were always there and dinner was always prepared when we got home. Our summers always closed with one trip to a department store for school clothes. I was left disappointed because, for me, the shopping trip was preceded by the annual ritual of determining what, among my two brothers' old clothes, would be suitable for my next school year. So, during the turbulent, ever-chang-



ing fashion fads of the seventies, I always wore last year's style. I didn't care, though, until junior high.

My father, a disabled veteran who never worked a day that I can remember, stayed at home, watched television, told stories, and drank whiskey. He never abused any of us, as a matter of fact, he never did anything except watch television, tell stories, and drink whiskey. I can remember watching my father while he watched television. I can see his old-style glasses which had been broken and repaired with cellophane tape, his hair slicked back with Brell Cream and the smell of Old Spice after-shave strong in the air. He would sit in an old, worn recliner. Beside the chair would be a TV tray with a bottle of whiskey, a shot glass and big glass of ice water. He watched TV and laughed right along with the laugh tracks and told stories during the commercials. He really didn't care if anyone else was there or not — or who that person was. I can remember the awful realization of the extent to which his drinking had affected him. When I was about 12 years old, he

suggested to my mother that I might like a tricycle for Christmas. Until then, I thought little of his drinking; after that, I knew he didn't really live in the real world. I would liked to have said that I knew and loved my father, but I couldn't. So, while my mother worked and my father sank deeper and deeper into alcoholism, my brothers and I lived largely on our own. Each morning my mother would get up early, prepare our school lunches and walk to the corner bus stop to go to work. We had a car, but my mother didn't drive and my father very seldom drove. The elementary school we attended wasn't far from our house, so we walked.

When I finished the sixth grade, the idea of junior high school both excited and frightened me. My brothers had gone on to junior high two years before and the three of us now rode the city bus to the new school. I remember the first time I saw the junior high school; I thought it was so huge that I would never be able to find my way around in it. I had no idea that finding my way around the building would soon be the least of my





worries. In elementary school, hand-me-down clothes didn't seem to matter, but junior high school, the eve of socialization, required the right clothes, the right haircut, the right sneakers, that is, if being accepted ranked high on one's list of priorities. I desperately wanted to be accepted. My best friends from elementary school quickly assimilated into the junior high culture, having come from regular two-parent homes in which Dad worked and Mom chaired the cookbook committee. Assimilation wasn't nearly as easy for me. After all, when someone asked me what my dad did for a living, what was I going to say? My situation did, however, grant me several advantages. I had one friend who couldn't go anywhere unless his mother drove him. I didn't know how that felt. If I wanted to go somewhere, all I needed was permission. A bicycle, bus, or my two legs always sufficed to take me where I wanted to go. My independence had not prepared me, however, for the fierce peer pressure that I would face in junior high school.

My first year of junior high proved un-

eventful. I maintained the same friends that had gone to my elementary school, with the addition of a few other misfits. Only two or three of them actually visited me at home, though. One of my best friends, Scott, seemed more than any other to accept my situation as an alternative to the "Brady Bunch" family system. Scott's parents were divorced, which might have helped him to sympathize with me.

Scott and one other boy, Mark, became my closest and, sometimes, only friends. We traveled together on our ten-speed bikes to far and distant neighborhoods, most frequently, the neighborhood in which the upper class of the junior high school lived. With the help of a school directory, we rode our bikes past the homes of the most popular kids in the school. At the end of the day, we would ride back to our own neighborhood and talk about the houses and cars, the pools and parks. Occasionally, we would even talk to some of these people, if we found them at the park playing basketball or at the public pool. I didn't realize it at the time, but now I'm sure that we stuck out like the proverbial





sore thumbs. My greatest desire in life at that time was to somehow become one of those popular people.

Scott and Mark frequently stayed over at my house during the summer. To the outsider, this might have seemed unpleasant, but if you got past the superficial, my house was a teenage boy's dream. My mother and father slept in different rooms upstairs and retired early. My mother, because of her early work hours, could not be disturbed. My father, for reasons of his own, wouldn't wake up, even if the house was on fire (a proven hypothesis, but that's another story). So, roughly after eight p.m. Scott, Mark and I were on our own. We watched what we wanted on TV; we even went out for midnight bike rides if the notion struck us. I enjoyed these times, but still they did not satisfy my desire to run with the in-crowd. My ambition to be popular clouded my vision of my true friends.

Several blocks away from my house lived a set of twins who were of the upper class of the school. I invited them both to come and spend the

night, along with Scott. I worried that they would see my father and was terrified of what they would think if they did, but it was important to me that they came because they were regular, normal kids. I had begun to realize by this time that I didn't necessarily want to be popular, I just wanted to be normal. Scott arrived early and we waited for the twins to come over. My father was already asleep and I wanted to be sure to answer the door as soon as they arrived. They were late, so Scott and I went to the back room to watch TV, confident we would hear the door. The first thing I heard, however, was a loud crash. I ran to the front door, greeted by the sight of the door standing open, my guests standing outside, and my father in a heap on the floor. He had opened the door and immediately had fallen down. I wanted to die. I helped my father back upstairs and we continued our evening. It didn't turn out as bad as I thought it would and the twins were as kind about the incident as you could expect teenage boys to be. We just didn't talk about it. And as far as I know, they didn't talk about it later.





After that incident, I gave up trying to be something that I just could not. My situation at home simply disallowed some of the things that teenagers did. I learned to live with that. I also began to develop a deeper self-confidence and became less dependent on what others thought. Additionally, more kids understood than I would have thought, not because they were just particularly sensitive, but because alcoholism had in some way touched them — if not through a parent, an aunt or uncle or grandparent. About a year later, my father was diagnosed with cancer and died a short while after that in the Veteran's Administration Hospital. The funeral was a sad affair — not because I had lost someone that I loved, but because I was so angry at never having that person to begin with.



She does not paint pictures
of rainbows and butterflies
dancing
against variegated spring blooms.
Nor of white picket fence
With a handsome father, waving
goodbye as he takes his briefcase
from her doting mother.

She paints pictures
of her friends
bleeding
from bullet wounds,
of bodies falling in the alleyway
just below her window.

She paints pictures
of mothers with vacant eyes
She paints pictures
Of men with only dread in their eyes
Sitting in big cars, blazing fire from their windows.

At six years old,
She paints: her best friend
in a pool of blood,
lying dead,
on the school's playground.

* This poem was inspired
by a six year-old's story on PBS



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Women of the Nineties —
We're called that by our peers
But are we really different
From those of yesteryear?

We have no black iron stove
The scrubboard's not our foe
For our children to have clothes
We do not have to sew.

There is no cow to milk
For our butter and our cheese
In summer we're not hot
In winter we don't freeze.

If we need to travel
It's not by horse or mule
We don't depend on kerosene
As our only fuel.

Those women of the past
Were pioneers, it's true.
But can't you say the same
When it comes to me and you?

We're in a whole new world
We work now and we face
A different kind of struggle
As we assume our place.

Stress — it comes from all sides
At work, at home, at play
We handle countless crises
Almost every single day.

I know we have conveniences
Like cars and perma-press
And microwaves and dishwashers
They're useful, I confess!

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But as we take on other roles
And challenges anew
Compare us with them and you'll see
Our differences are few.

What if those women had to work
Each day with a computer
And chauvinistic bosses
Who, right or wrong, dispute her?

As a mother could she cope
When her babes are born
With finding them a babysitter
And saying "goodbye" each morn?

Would her home be spic and span
And her children mild and meek,
If she had all this to do
And worked a forty-hour week?

There are moments on occasion
We might wish for simpler days
But God put us in this century
Our foremothers to amaze.

We have no limit to our future
And potentiality.
Unlike those women we can be
Whate'er we want to be.



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“**H**ere he comes,” I think to myself. Everyday, like clockwork, he works the corner of Fannin and Preston in the afternoon. For those who work downtown, he is as familiar a sight as the Civil Court Building he works in front of. Not that he actually has a job, mind you. In fact, very few probably even know his name. Maybe I should walk on and cross this street about five blocks down ...

Most call him the “One-Arm Bandit,” obviously a name never used around him. He is a handicapped panhandler who has had to have asked everyone who works downtown for money at least once. If you have never had the pleasure of running into the Bandit downtown, just wait awhile. He will grace you with his presence, sooner or later.

Spotting a fresh target, he immediately stops pestering another bystander to approach me with that open-eyed, begging-for-sympathy look. The most apparent thing about him is his lack of a

left arm. Whether he is a veteran or not, I do not know. His face is dark, rough and heavily bearded with hair so rough and coarse that it makes the hair on his head looked almost combed. He is smelly, with a smell that almost forms a barrier around him. His clothes are a dull grayish-brown, and he always wears a loose-fitting Ace bandage around what remains of his left arm. His eyes are clear, at least I have never seen them bloodshot, and although his physical shape looks worse than his wardrobe, he is not an old man. Beneath the dirt and the funk, he looks like he could be around 30 years old. I wonder what is taking the traffic light so long ...

As he approaches me, I ready myself for his sympathy tactics, “Say, Brother.” Oh, brother, I say. One of his most popular tactics is identifying with a person. I look him in his eyes while he is talking to me. I watch him talk, but I do not listen. I have heard it all before. “I just blew into town, man, an’ I’m tryin’ to stay at this



place down the way,” or “man, I ain’t had nuttin’ to eat since,” Too many times I have heard this voice. I heard it 12 years ago, outside my junior high school, every afternoon asking for some change because he was so hungry. One day, the principal gave him a plate of the lunch we were having. It was a very moving thing to see. He looked surprised, and started weeping. “God bless y’all. I wanna thank you! Y’all are so kind to ... God bless!” As he took his plate of whatever it was, covered in gravy, amidst the sounds of clapping students and faculty (understand, it was a church school), I and a few others followed him until he left the building, then we peeked out of the front window of the school. He made it to the corner, dumped the plate of food into a bush and went on his way.

By now, the Bandit is beginning to feel he is wasting his time with me and looks ready to give me his “God bless” that he gives to those who treat him indifferently. Usually about this time I come to the conclusion that even if there is a chance he is lying about why he wants money,

there is also a chance he might be sincere. “OK, man,” I say as I take out my wallet, in that “I-want-you-to-know-you-don’t-fool-me” tone of voice. As I reach into my wallet, three men in suits pass by the Bandit. He looks up, withdraws his hand and mutters, “Uh, just ... just hold on a minute, man.” The Bandit leaves me standing there, holding my wallet, while he puts his moves on the three businessmen that just passed. I have been put on hold.

His tactics are unsuccessful with the men, so he turns back around to me. I stand there for several moments, for a long eye contact with the Bandit, then I turn and continue on my way.



THE DEMON AND THE MISTRESS

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Down the beach,
about three miles southwest of here,
is an old relic of a lighthouse.

There
lived a fisherman
who
people say
knew the secrets of the sea
for she never denied him her bounty,
and he never took more than he needed.

A fisherman, yes
but
an old pilot, really
who
when wearied with the sky,
became enamored with the sea.

“There’s a demon up there!”
I’ve heard the old pilots say.

“A demon in the air!
A demon to destroy those pilots who,
lost in the exhilaration and freedom of flight,
wish to fly higher and higher.
A demon to slap down those
who would seek to rise up and touch
the face of God.”

Up the main road, there’s a small airport
where the old pilots from these parts
gather
to drink coffee and tell stories,
as old pilots are wont to do.

It has been said
by the old boys
(in hushed and reverent tones),
that the old fisherman
once met the demon in the sky
and somehow survived.



They say he learned secrets
from the demon in the sky
and that's why he stopped flying and chose to
embrace as his mistress
the sea.

For she can be a loving mistress
if you know her secrets.

Sometimes,
along the beach
you can see the flotsam
of a lost civilization impaled on a seashell
trapped and half buried in the sand.
Bleached white as an eggshell,
fragile and reposed
awaiting rediscovery by the seminal offspring
of those primitive struggles
of so long ago
when the sea was nurturing her first infants.

Devouring fire
wind
ice
thunder
and ether from the stars,
for her caldron-like womb of chemicals
and electricity.
Feeding the tendrils of life
for the sentence to come.

For the dendrites
the axons and synapses
forming pathways
for electricity's fire
to fuel the neurons of hunger
and thirst
the shivering wonder
at the slap and the cry
forming pathways
for sight





and sound
and smell
and the tactile sense for the stinging taste
of wind-driven rain.

The gentle coolness of a mountain spring
the sensual, sexual musky mergings of spirits
and the sound of a thousand thundering horsemen
screaming the blood-throbbing, red rage
of anger and war
and the vacuous sadness
of loss and despair.

The pain, exhilaration and joy of birth,
the passions of love
the obsessions of art
and the intoxication of achievement
all these sprang
wraithlike
from the sea.

Last year the old fisherman
went home forever
to his mistress
our mother
the sea.

The ol' boys at the airport
didn't think my request was strange.

The most lively of the group
looked at me with those clear
blue-grey eyes that only the best pilots
seem to have.

The eyes that could spot an enemy Messerschmidt
at ten miles away
or a cumulus cloud formation at twenty.

"They don't let us fly anymore."
He said.





“They took our licenses away.
They say we’re too old!
But I know where we can ‘borrow’
a Cessna.
To hell with the FAA!”

So, from a small airplane
five thousand feet in the sky,
the ol’ boys and I
spread the old fisherman’s ashes over the
Texas Gulf Coast
from Corpus Christi to High Island.

The waves of the sea seemed to beckon,
eager to embrace him
as his spirit merged with the sea.
Much the same way I suppose
as when after many years
a poem is perfectly read
and finally understood
by its own writer.

For the sea can be a loving mistress,
if you know her secrets.





When I first met
Old Payton Graham
I was but twenty-one.
His hair was white
His wrinkled skin
Was red from too much sun.

Old Payton was
A railroad man
For more than forty years.
He'd traveled almost
everywhere,
Both far away and near.

I learned a lot
from Payton Graham.
He had a wealth to give.
He'd profited so much,
It seems,
From all the life he'd lived.

They seemed so wise
The things he'd say,
While telling me his tales.
A regular
Philosopher,
A ridin' on the rails.

He had a family
Somewhere,
And wrote to them a lot
But all the letters
That he sent
Were more than what he got.

His home was in a red
Caboose
That trailed a wanderin' freight.
Conductor on the
Santa Fe.
For Payton it was great





Together we rode
Miles and miles,
A year or more it seems.
And talked and joked
Most all the time
And shared each other's dreams.

We rode across the
Desert plain
And through the piney woods
Through hurricanes
And driving snow
Through dust and even floods.

And all the time
I didn't know
Just what effect he had
On such a wide-eyed
Innocent,
This wandering, wondering lad.

Old Payton was
My Socrates.
He taught me how to see
And keep both my
Eyes open wide
To what surrounded me.

He opened up
My vacuum
And filled my empty brain
With knowledge I
Had never known
Before I rode that train.

"You've got to trust
your fellow man,"
Old Payton he would say.
"And lend him all the
help you can.
You're better off that way."



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“Be kind to those
 Who haven't got
 As much as you have.
 Give of yourself to
 All you know.
 Be generous with your love.”

“But there are those
 In this old world
 Who may not wish you best.
 You'll have to learn
 Which ones to trust
 And which ones you should test.”

Of all the things
 That Payton said
 One thing keeps coming back.
 That I should learn
 To separate
 The fiction from the fact.

“Don't just accept
 Things as they look
 Upon their outer face.
 Sometimes you'll find
 There is deceit
 In this old human race.”

And I was there
 In that caboose
 And on that very day
 I looked at him
 And realized
 Payton Graham had passed away.

Although my eyes
 Were welled with tears
 And pain was in my soul
 I knew that Payton
 was at peace
 And reached his final goal.



A funeral with
A few good friends
Was all that Payton had.
His family must have
Never known
That Payton Graham was dead.

We put old Payton's
Body down
Next to a little church
That sits along the
Railroad line
In fields of ash and birch.

So every time
A train goes by
The whistle sounds
In my mind
It salutes the man
A lyin' in the ground.



I only hope
One day I can
Be someone's memory.
And make a mark
On someone's life
Like Payton did for me

For every young man
Needs a guide
To show him how to stand.
I found that guide,
An old gray man
Whose name was Payton Graham.



Has your life become boring? Do you need a change
From your drive to town each day?
Then dial six, three, five, four, 0, 0, 0
And let Metro show you a new way.
Discover the joys of waiting in rain
For your route that's long past overdue
Or running five blocks to catch the early one
Just to watch its taillights fade from your view.
If you like to meet people (unusual ones)
Then Metro's the place to be —
There's nice old men that talk to themselves
And bag ladies that want to ride for free.
The bus may break down or catch on fire
Or become stranded in a flood
You may sit next to a seeing-eye dog
Or a construction man covered with mud.
If you're petite, Beware when you choose a seat
'Cause, "They'll" climb aboard and take aim —
The fatties will run toward that extra space
In the seat beside your small frame!

Old ladies will gossip, and babies may cry
The workmen may turn the air blue.
If there isn't a seat you must stand in the aisle
Balancing a book, coat and umbrella, too.
Riding the bus is an adventure of sorts
(What else only costs seventy cents?).
It's cheap entertainment, that's for sure
You might see ANYTHING I'm convinced!



ON THE WAY TO WAR IN KUWAIT

Jula Tulip climbed into the shuttle bus and made her way to the only available seat, towards the rear, behind the wheelwell where some other, nameless, University of Houston-Downtown student sat, staring out the smeary window onto the parking lot. The doors closed just as the creaky bus jumped to a start. Jula found herself suddenly, but not neatly, deposited in the hot vinyl seat, her books sliding in her lap. The August heat made her doubt the efficiency of the bus air conditioner, but the radio was tuned to a rock station, so she made the best of the situation, tapping the seat to the beat, and bouncing with the rhythm of the bus as it jostled up the hill. The drive kept her mind from worrying about the coming exam in Crime and Delinquency. Exams made her nervous. A news broadcast interrupted the music just as the driver applied the brakes at the top of the hill. The announcement was as follows, "A large assembly of Iraqi troops has invaded Kuwait this morning, and there is reported bombing and shell-

ing, together with military occupation of most major Kuwaiti installations. Sources indicate that about 60 percent of the Kuwaiti army is now on summer leave, making any resistance the responsibility of a small residual force, and Palestinian and Kuwaiti civilians."

At six a.m. on August 2, from the living area of their 11th floor apartment in Kuwait University's Shuwaykh housing, Jula's sister, Mala, screamed at her sleeping husband, Shafeeq Jhabra, "There's machine-gun fire and shelling!" He found his way to the elevator and then to the ground floor to investigate. A cry from a crowd of colleagues informed him of the trouble, "The Iraqis have taken over the campus!"

Shafeeq Jhabra could see the university's main gate from the elevator, and indeed, there were tanks, trucks, and hundreds of soldiers. Crowds of university employees on their way to work were being stopped, taken out of their cars,

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and made to put their hands on their heads or to lie on the ground. For hours the entire country was in shock. Confusion was rampant. Everyone was on the phone: asking, checking, or getting information. No one thought they would wake up in the world of Saddam Hussein and his army.

Jula plugged a quarter into one of the corridor phones and waited anxiously for her mother's reply from the other end.

"Mom? Mom? This is Jula. Did you hear?"

"Yes, Jula. Mala just phoned. It's true. Kuwait's been invaded. They don't know what will happen next. They've taken over the university where Shafeeq is. They were all right when she called, but she's very frightened."

After Jula's mother calmed her down, she coaxed her to go ahead and take her exam. Jula explained that she would not be home at the usual time after the class.

"After class, come to the Sheraton, Jula. I'm meeting relatives again before the wedding

tonight. OK?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Do well on your exam. And don't worry."

In downtown Kuwait City, soldiers burst into a hotel where Shafeeq Jhabra's cousin was working as a busboy. They seized the safe deposit boxes and hotel cash, and transferred all the hotel employees to an assembly area where thousands of civilians were detained for several hours. Those who questioned Iraqi orders were beaten with clubs.

At the university, Shafeeq Jhabra and Mala lingered in a state of disbelief. The air conditioning had stopped working on campus, and no one could sleep from the heat. The campus supermarket had closed because of the mad rush there to buy necessities. A terrified Sudanese informed Shafeeq's brother that the adjacent Port of Kuwait had been taken over, and that the army was asking for Kuwaiti employees.

Late in the afternoon of August 3, Shafeeq Jhabra, Mala and their two children passed



through the campus checkpoint (after being searched) and into the deserted streets of Kuwait. The city had changed overnight. Heavy tanks had destroyed the roads and highways, and the Iraqi army was everywhere. As the family drove slowly through the empty streets, they encountered hundreds of abandoned cars, some stripped of their wheels and parts, and others burning. They drove past burning stores that billowed smoke into the blackening Kuwait sky, and the smell of gunpowder hung heavy in the air.

At the hotel with her mother, Jula expressed relief that her exam was over. She was sure she had made an A. Preparations were well under way for her older sister's wedding, and dozens of guests had gathered in one of the ground floor lounges to chat and celebrate. The guests all tried to be gay, but thoughts of Mala in Kuwait subdued the hopeful group. Jula's mother had the added worry over accommodations. So many guests had arrived; it appeared there wouldn't be enough room at the Sheraton.

Shafeeq Jhabra and his family did what many Kuwaitis were doing. They left the campus, which was no longer safe now that it had become a stronghold for the Iraqi army, and sought security at his parent's house in the Kuwait City suburbs. Thirty-two people sought refuge in his parent's house. With rumors of fighting about to break out, they all slept in the basement. In the days following the invasion, as a result of transportation problems and the rapidly growing scarcity of goods, new sidewalk markets suddenly began mushrooming all over the city. These open bazaars drew large crowds of people looking for a box of oranges, bananas, or other items that were fast becoming rare and expensive.

Kalua Julip argued with the French caterer over the quote for the food for her wedding. "It's too much! We have to keep it under this price. You're too expensive. You'll have to cut it, or we'll go to another. We can still cancel."

"It is not the budget quote you gave?"



asked the manager, perturbed.

"Not at all. It's up \$2000. I never quoted you this. My mother will be hysterical!"

"I will go to work on it right away, miss. Sorry for this inconvenience."

On August 22, Jula found herself standing in "the longest line she had ever seen" at registration for fall classes. After two hours in the long line, sweaty and impatient with "the whole silly business," Jula smiled gratefully when a classmate from her summer group pushed her way through the mass with a Pepsi and some chips.

"I saw you in the line an hour ago!" laughed her friend.

"More like two," was Jula's reply.

"How's it going? I mean, with your sister in Kuwait."

"They're trying to find a way out of there now, at least for Mala and the kids, but it's tough and very dangerous. They're still at the house of Shafeeq Jhabra's parents, along with about 40 other people."

Jula's friend looked up at the ceiling and

laughed. "It's hot! Why don't they turn on the fans?"

Jula laughed, too.

"Yea. What are fans for anyway?"

During the third week of the occupation in Kuwait, the Iraqis began a brutal offensive against Kuwaiti society. The policy of mass arrests and seizures of young Kuwaitis at checkpoints was intensified, and torture was practiced on a wide scale. One of Shafeeq Jhabra's cousins came home one night to the crowded safety of Shafeeq's parent's basement with a gruesome tale to tell. With tears in his eyes, shivering in shock, he related his story to his concerned cousin.

"My friend at the ministry was found with an anti-occupation newsletter in his desk. He told the lieutenant it was not his, but he would not believe. They questioned him about the resistance for maybe an hour, holding all the members at gunpoint. They beat him and still he told them he was innocent, but they would not believe. Then they tied him by one hand to the revolving ceiling





fan and he swung there, around in circles, screaming for hours while we listened and watched. Then the screaming stopped. When they finally cut him down, it was too late. The women were crying.”

Beginning in September, anywhere from one to five Kuwaitis were executed in front of their homes every day, most with their families watching. The owner of a travel agency was executed for possession of a Kuwaiti flag and a few family photographs. Six Kuwaiti doctors were executed on charges of hiding valuable equipment and providing medical care to Kuwaiti resistance members.

Shafeeq Jhabra and Mala approached an unarmed checkpoint on Damascus road and decided to proceed until they heard shouts from behind. As soon as the soldier who stopped them saw that Shafeeq was a university professor, he yanked open the back door of the car and began searching. When he found an old pamphlet that had been in the car for months, containing photos of the Emir and the Prime minister, he flew into a rage and took aim at the car with his machine

gun. Mala screamed out that the pamphlets were only children's programs. He stopped and stood in front of the car with the machine gun aimed while he read the pamphlet. He handed Shafeeq the pamphlet and ordered him to tear it up. Impatient with Shafeeq, he grabbed the pictures back, and threw them on the ground. Then he shouted, “Leave! Now! Next time I'll shoot!”

“Jula, did you hear the news about the Downtown Center last night?” asked one of her classmates in the 8th floor hallway lounge, Jula's favorite place to “hang out” between classes.

“No. What?” she replied.

“There was a robbery and vandalism. They did a lot of damage. A couple of students were arrested. Guess they were fighting over some stolen books or something. Everybody's talking about it.”

“It's the first I've heard of it. I'm glad they were arrested if they caused damage. This campus is normally so clean.”

“Yea, and the computers and all the equip-



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ment here work most of the time. Even when they break, they're repaired quickly."

"Not like some places!"

They both laughed, remembering another campus they had attended together.

When Shafeeq Jhabra and his wife went to retrieve his furniture and personal library from the university faculty housing, they had to answer questions at gunpoint to the new Iraqi university rector. After they were allowed entrance, they found scenes of chaos in student housing. Furniture was overturned, mattresses were slashed, closets and cupboards broken with clubs, photos ripped and books torn. Computers, cars, and the law library were looted. Department files had been destroyed and most English books were torn. Ink was splattered on books everywhere.

Early in December Julia sat in one of her classes waiting for the professor to arrive. A few of her classmates were joking about graduation being a long way off. When one of the group asked Julia

jokingly if she thought they'd ever get out of there, she smiled and left the room in a hurry.

Later that evening Julia held Mala tight in her arms, and they cried together along with their mother and Mala's two children. Shafeeq Jhabra had just crossed safely into Jordan and would follow his wife to Houston as soon as he could get on a plane.

(This is a fictional story based on factual events.)



Icy fog blowing off Lock Carron,
mist and snowflakes born of the hills
collide to flow a lazy journey through the glen.

In the meadow the sheep are huddled and
bleating,
sometimes moving in search of icy blades
scarcely found among the white and grey.

Near above are ancient stones once violently
thrust from under.
Huge, jagged grey monoliths whose stories hide
beneath moss of green and blue.

Farther up are majestic deer
with spectacular crowns carried high.
Silently they move down a ragged gorge.

A determined march though in peril,
they descend before darkness swells
to feed on bracken and gorse.



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When I first met Hope, I felt as if I had just encountered a hurricane. Loud and obnoxious, in a charming sort of way, she took me under her wing on my first day working at Palais Royal. Whether the impression was good or bad, I knew she would leave a lasting impression on people. She didn't set out to offend anyone. However, her natural curiosity and whimsical nature sometimes left an aftertaste of "foot" in her mouth. I didn't think that bothered her much.

To look at Hope, with her electric blue contact lenses and bleached blonde hair, you would think she invented the word "attitude." Yet, the minute she opened her mouth, it was obvious she had an accessible personality. Wit was one of her most endearing qualities. She walked around with a happy-go-lucky stride, a confidence that went far beyond her nineteen years. Aside from her faux cosmetic changes, there was nothing fake about Hope. She would tell you something like it was and add in her little anecdotes on life. She

was good to her friends and didn't hesitate to go out on a limb for them. One would never think that the girl with Judy Tenuta's voice and Bart Simpson's vocabulary would have a heart of gold, but she did.

My many outings with Hope had proven to be adventures. Chaos must have been her middle name, because wherever we went, we encountered the unusual. I believed it was the uniqueness of her wild personality that attracted the bizarre, whether it was at a party, the mall, or even the Stop-N-Go.

I vividly remember one evening last summer when Hope rented some bad movies for some friends and me. We were sitting around, bored with the movies, when Hope redeemed herself with a brilliant idea. "Let's dress up and go to Two Pesos. It's two a.m., and everyone will be there." The bunch of us sat there in silence as we watched her put on my chicken feet slippers, a long lace shawl, and a bowler hat. To complete her funny-



farm look, she donned a pair of dark sunglasses.

At that point, all we could do was laugh. She looked like an obscure cross between Stevie Nicks and Foghorn Leghorn. "Well, don't just sit there," she barked, "Find something to wear." Reluctantly, we all dressed up like mentally disturbed, gossamer fools. We proceeded on to Two Pesos where, as luck would have it, we ran into people we knew. It turned out to be a memorable evening, with a lot of interesting stares and conversation. Hope managed to turn a boring evening into book-worthy material.

Like a breath of fresh hot air, she sometimes had a knack for saying the wrong things at the wrong times. On the Fourth of July, Hope, Carmen, Kitten and I were enroute to Sam Houston Park for the fireworks display. I had taken the wrong exit, so we had to detour on some unfamiliar side roads. Thanks to Hope's navigation, we got lost. We picked a fine place to do it. There, before our startled eyes, was a police roadblock, officers checking cars for alcohol. Being in a celebratory mood, and ignoring our illegal drink-

ing age, earlier we packed the back seat full of beer. To increase the tenseness of our predicament, a large Mack truck was about to back into my car. Carmen, Kitten and I panicked, but cool-mannered Hope stayed calm. I frantically pushed on my horn in hopes that the truck would stop in time. The horn set off a chorus of screams from Carmen and Kitten. Hope, clinging to the beer like a mother would her young, screeched, "Would you chill, folks? We've got beer in the back. Don't draw attention to ourselves." The possibility of us becoming pancakes was enough to command attention, never mind the fact that we were harboring beer. Clearly, the main priority was a matter of dispute. The truck stopped in time, sparing our lives, and the officers came to make sure we were okay. While pandemonium had consumed us, Hope had managed to conceal the beer from sight, saving us from potential mug shots.

Her signature phrase, "Would you chill?" was her term of endearment. It was used in situations of confusion, panic, and any other time when our extended life span was questionable. She said



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this to rowdy children, teachers, managers, family, and anyone else she felt needed to hear it. I believe she said it to try to create law and order, but it usually did not evoke that desired effect.

Her dynamic personality and quick mind have saved her from many speeding tickets and vehicular mishaps. She was the very last person I would label a safe driver, and to reveal that she took driver's education would be a disservice to the system. Yet, she would insist she passed with flying colors. Hope had a strange distaste for law-breaking bikers. Nothing infuriated this girl like a biker cycling on the main street. Unfortunately, I'd had the opportunity of witnessing her taking the law into her own hands on more than one occasion. In her words, she "gently taps" their bikes with her front bumper to "alert them to move to the sidewalk." Viewing this scenario more than once, I could honestly say that a man being thrown to the grass did not get there from a "gentle tap." I had seen the look of terror on these people's faces as they heard this perfectly primed attacker recite their biking violations to them. "Hey, buddy,

you were not biking defensively. You need to learn to stay on the sidewalk." At these times, I usually sank down in my seat, thinking of ways to assassinate the man who gave her a license.

Hope's intolerance of pedestrians and her reckless driving habits seemed to be the only points of strife in our friendship. I had learned a lot from her. She taught me how to get the most punch out of a tequila shot by alternating just the right amounts of salt and lime. She also took me to my first fraternity party, and introduced me to the wonderful world of fake I.D.'s. Thanks to her, I learned an entire vocabulary of creative expressions and slang terms that send my parents' heads into a tailspin.

I learned most of these things on the weekends my mom went out of town. On one occasion, Hope was bartending for the group of people who had temporarily moved into my house. All were warned of the potency of her drinks. I spoke to them with firsthand knowledge. Still the brave drank up, throwing caution to the wind. A few hours later, I surveyed the scene before me. Bod-



ies of my once full-of-life friends were now good-for-nothing pieces of lint on my floor. I was sure that Hope had killed them. She stood there, laughing, not quite believing she was the cause of this scene. Her potion had no effect on her. She suggested we go to a club. I agreed and announced that “any person with the breath of life still in them” was welcome to join us. Julie came, and Hope and I then went to the club. When we returned, not a soul had moved. Hope mused that they must have really enjoyed her drinks. Julie and I both looked at her and rolled our eyes in disgust. It was another memorable weekend.

In all the time I knew Hope, she was full of pranks and jokes. Yet, no matter how hard I tried, I was never able to beat her at her own game, until “The Night of the Eggs.”

Hope, Sara and I had just left a party, distressed at its lack of decent guys. We were decidedly bored, and for lack of better things to do, drove around town. We enjoyed a few car chases with guys in cool cars, and Hope was impressed with my high-speed driving skills. Perhaps, she

notioned, her driving habits had rubbed off on me after all. She suggested, “Let’s go egg somebody. There are a bunch of people in parked cars over by Meyer Park.” Sara and I agreed, and we bought some eggs.

I drove up to a parked car where a couple was enjoying each other’s company, and Hope and Sara bombarded it with eggs. I slammed on the accelerator and drove off. Our laughter soon turned to panic when we noticed their egg-defaced car tailing us. I quickly turned left, doing about eighty-five, and then turned right into a residential neighborhood. The car was in hot pursuit behind me, and I knew it would not give up easily. I heard no words of wisdom from the usually outspoken Hope. She was really quiet. I took a sharp turn onto South Braeswood and raced into a respectable looking driveway where I quickly turned off my engine and lights. I had lost the very persistent car behind me. We were safe.

Sara managed to regain her composure, so I looked into the back seat to see how Hope was doing. All color had drained from her face, and she





turned a death white. In all the time I'd known her, I had never seen that look of fear on her face. Oh, she had seen it on mine many times, but this was a first for her. The tables had been turned. She finally had a taste of her own medicine. "Oh my God," she said, "I almost wet my pants. I was so scared." I looked at her, not wanting to show my own sense of fear, and smugly said, "Would you just chill?"

Jerry Tumlinson

WAILING



There is a snake in my heart
that will not shed its skin.
When philosophers talk of just wars,
my eyes drip venom
that I drink
that I drink
and live.

The venom only kills anger
and defangs the poison in my brain,
while my heart pines
while my heart pines for the victims of genocide
all over the face of this earth.



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The dark depths of space had fallen upon the earth. Moisture soon filled the air and through the dense mist, benevolent lights could be seen flickering through the heavens as transcendental bodies slowly journeyed southward. The brisk silent air had begun its rendezvous with the wooden sculptures, created but temporarily forsaken by nature. God's grace had withdrawn its presence from the earth and all was now blind. Cradled beneath a sycamore tree, I could feel the cold crystals as they slowly descended. Fearing more would follow, I nestled deep within its hollow base, using the lifeless petals to shield myself from the imminent blessing to come.

I now lay still, almost lifeless, drained by the tedious journey. The cold night air etherealized my body, and I felt myself slowly drifting toward the other side. As I lay there beneath the branches, images of days gone overshadowed my mind. My thoughts, consumed

in hatred, were not my own, as though possessed by what was yet to come. The branches above, now crystal white, glistened in the soft, tranquil moonlight, like angels reaching for the heavens. "Oh, that they could take away," I thought, "the scars of yesterday, then today would be no more; the nightmares could end and all which was would be forever lost in the shadows of the night."

The earth began drifting away now and my thoughts were few as I left the world and the dark memories behind. As I journeyed through the night, the passage of time slowly defeated the shadow of day and God's grace soon returned as did I, leaving behind time, forever lost.

Infinite blankets of still virgin rain now blessed the earth with scenes of benevolence. Crystals hung from every branch and in the distance flowed a glittering trail of rain. Looking about, I could feel the beauty of the forest as if it and I were now one and the rain our soul's light. In savage revolt, the sky rescinded its fury, and



again, all was quiet.

The essence of the heavens had been recaptured by the water's eye, and the rain resumed its journey southward. For awhile, I took great comfort and delight in finding the scene about me was no longer clouded. A sense of peace descended upon my soul as my mind emptied. I now sat motionless, cautiously awaiting the return of my captor's wrath.

As I glanced down on the rain, silence again covered the earth; the waters paused their southward bound journey, and surrounded by the wondrous statues and benevolent bodies within the water's eye was death's image in all of its hell-bound glory.

Time past now returned and the truth of the dark secrets it brought was revealed by the light of day. My spirit cried out in utter disgust as the dead memories resurrected. My body shrieked in terror for I realized the nightmare was without sleep. I attempted to close the doors of my mind,

but my evasions were in vain. The race was no more. All which was, was now. The elements and the earth were again one, and, I now discovered, I was the center of the rain.

My body, no longer able to endure the battle, began surrendering all to the eye. My weary spirit, frightened and bewildered, continued to resist as I sank deeper and deeper into the corridors of the awakening. Fearing defeat, I made feeble, yet desperate attempts to escape, which were soon lost as I reluctantly succumbed to the eye's will. I then began praying for heaven's descent upon my soul, but the ghost departed not.

Hell bound was I and all who followed, for I knew now, there was surely no escape for the damned.

Once again, God's grace began withdrawing its presence, and only benevolent lights could be seen dancing about the heavens. The night winds soon began their timeless journey, and I could feel the cold damp air as it swept



ever so gently across my feet which cradled near the water's edge. Although grace's shadow consumed all, glancing down on the rain now, I found all was clear, yet, the earth was still as blind as the night of day. Damned was she, as was I, for freedom in truth we had not. "Oh, let her be condemned," I prayed, "for greed is her virtue and evil her companion. I am the true light and the son shall be my guide. But be merciful for I, too, am the lamb of the night."



He lives among the shadows of the bridge
And wanders among the lights at nights
When all academe sleep deep
In the far corners of sweet solitude.
When no one watches, he crawls from his
cardboard box
Dusting the thick layer of shame and despair
Lining his heart, no longer pumping
In the living rooms of the affluent American
Who play the game of ignorance
While living in scornful bliss.
"Lazy bums!" they say.
"We should send them all to the Middle East!"
"Would you like to fight for your country?" I asked.
"I already did," he said.
"Now I must fight for my dignity."



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JENNY'S BAYOU BLUES, OR, THE NIGHT I GOT HIT BY A TRAIN

Lake Charles, Louisiana may not be your choice when it comes to vacation time, but it is one hell of a great place to party. And boy, did we Party. Jenny Stein Fleming, or “Red” as we called her in school, had decided we would hitchhike to Louisiana because “it was there,” and as she put it, “I jus’ want to eat crawfish and party with the ‘gators before I die.” We had already been through four states, so Louisiana was bound to come up sooner or later and, well, hell we had to go somewhere. Now, Jenny is a five foot nine, flaming red-head with a temper to match and the mouth of a sailor after a seven day drunk. Come to think of it, she kinda drank like a sailor too. She was also the closest to family I could get to back then. Looking back on it now, our being together made sense, what with my being so bitter and screwed up over the disintegration of my family and her, having her only daughter stolen from her at birth by, of all people, her mother. And so we were all we had, but whether that was a blessing or a curse

I can’t say; maybe it was a little of both.

Now, on the night in question we were coming back from “Cowboys, the largest C&W Bar in Louisiana,” after a long night of tequilas, electronic bulls, tears-in-your-beer music, and some of the best looking cowboys God ever poured into blue jeans. The house we rented was on the lake and we had to take the ferry across to get there, and on this night of nights Jenny decided not to wait for the ferry. She would take a short cut. Now, besides the fact you can’t take a shortcut across a lake, alarm bells should have gone off in my head, because this was not the first time Red decided she would take a shortcut.

The last time she got this particular wild hair, we ended up in “Texas chainsaw massacre” territory out on some dark, spooky, old dirt road in the middle of the night, out of gas, and thoroughly drunk. What I never could understand was how she figured that she could take a shortcut when she had never been in that part of Texas before.



But, then, she always did get pretty strange when she drank. You kinda got used to it.

But, on this particular night, it was worse. We had finished the bottle of tequila she had stolen from the bar and she kind of blacked out. Now, I don't mean passed out; I mean she just kind of left, and little Reagan from the "Exorcist" took over. I figured if I just stayed slouched down on my side of the car she wouldn't notice me. Unfortunately, it was a Volkswagon. Well, she ranted and raved for a while, taking on one dirt road after another until we finally came to these railroad tracks. I guess I'll never know why she decided to drive that car down those tracks; at the time I was too drunk to care. Now the car, after being bumped and battered over two miles of tracks, decided it wasn't going any further and quit. And that set Red off all over again. She cursed and kicked and screamed till I thought for sure her freckles were going to pop off her face.

Then I saw the lights, small white lights about half a mile away and heading right for us. Now, you'd think, this is when those bells are go-

ing to go off in my head. Strangely enough, they didn't. I just sat and thought about how neat it was the way the lights kept getting a little bigger with every second or two. When the whistle blew it was long and loud. You'd think I would at least panic. But, I was too drunk to get scared. And Jenny? Well, the demons were riding her harder than usual that night for her to notice anything, until I spoke to her. "Jenny?" I said as I watched the lights grow larger and larger. "What?" she roared as she hunched over the steering wheel, peering down at the ignition as if looking at it would give her the answers to all her tormenting questions. "I love you," I slurred, knowing as those lights came upon us that this would be the only time I could let her know what her friendship truly meant to me. "What?!" she screamed, looking up at me with confusion and anger written on her face, as if to say ...

When the train hit, it hit hard, but we were lucky. The impact forced both doors open. Jenny flew right out the door. I hit the windshield and then flew out. I'm lucky I've got a hard head

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because after hitting the windshield I was projected out of the car head first. All I could hear as I flew into the ditch was the sound of shattering glass and metal being torn apart. I didn't feel anything when I hit the ground (thank you, Jose Cuervo). I lay there for a minute or five, testing to see if there were any breaks. Again, I got lucky, just scrapes and an aching body, especially my head.

Crawling out of that ditch was the hardest thing I ever had to do, but I didn't feel like staying around. I wanted to go home. I guess Jenny did too because she crawled over a minute later, hair standing up on end and her face so white all I could make out were her eyes and freckles, or maybe it was just the lights from the train. I remember men on the train screaming out cliches like, "They's alive," and "Y'all don't move now, we've called for help," and Jenny standing up yelling, "Fuck You!" with all the fury she could summon up, which wasn't much since she sounded like bullfrogs croaking.

We finally made it out of the ditch and

found another dirt road, and Jenny said not to worry, she would find us a shortcut. We then spent the next hour walking through what seemed to be just a maze of dirt roads; we found out later we had stumbled onto the Pullman-Kellogg Plant. Finally, we found the main road, and lo-and-behold an empty parking lot, except for about three or four trucks.

Now, I just want to say here and now that we didn't plan on stealing anything. We just wanted to go home, and the keys were in the truck, and we were going to bring it back after we got home and got some sleep. We were either in shock or still stinking drunk, I really don't know for sure which. We got in the truck and drove further down the road until we came to the gate. The night watchman was there, so Jenny stopped to ask him which way she was supposed to go to get the hell out of there. He told her to pull over and he would find the map. So she did, and we proceeded to pass right out. If we were in our right minds at the time we probably would have snapped to what was going on, but we weren't, so





we were very surprised to wake up and find the truck surrounded by police cars. Very surprised.

They were pretty nice to us after they searched us and found no guns or any other weapons. They took us downtown and booked us for leaving the scene of an accident, being drunk and disorderly, stealing a company vehicle, and trespassing. When Pullman-Kellogg found out we got hit by the train, they said we were lucky to be alive and dropped the charges. The police dropped the charges, too. And why not? They now had something to laugh about for the next five years. And us? Well, we went home to get a good day's sleep and rest our aching bones to ready ourselves for the night awaiting us. You see, there was this great bar I found that I wanted to take Jenny to see when we woke up. It looked like a great place to party.

Author's Note

Of course, the car was demolished and we were feeling very sad as we explained what had happened to the girl we borrowed it from. She became hysterical, naturally, so Jenny offered to give her her own car (which I didn't believe for a minute). But, it is the thought that counts. Life's a bitch, but what else is new.





Don't laugh at me because I'm different from you.
I, too, can laugh and cry.

Don't show disgust because I lack physical control.
I'm aware of my disabilities —
they hurt my self-esteem.

Don't make fun of me
because I don't speak your language.
I have my own that you don't understand.

Don't call me stupid
because I'm slow to comprehend.
Very few people are geniuses.

Don't stare at me because you perceive
my abnormalities.
We all look different from one another.

Don't avoid me because I scare you.
Sometimes, you frighten me.

Give me respect,
for I am a human being
Just like you.



The candidates were introduced.
Steeds at the gate of a big race,
Possibly the race
That could start, revive, or end a career.
Respective supporters cheering
Like proud owners,
— Or nervous endorsers —
Anxious to see what their hard-earned support
hath wrought.
The front runners were expected to go at it the
hardest
Like two stallions,
Possessing strengths and weaknesses that
equalized.
Each aware of that young "dark horse";
That one contender in the pack that could
Break away from the rear and make it a three-way
race,
Or could even unexpectedly emerge
As the Favorite.

Each paraded their platform
Strengths, weaknesses, backgrounds,
— Concerns, issues, appearances and vernacular —
As the audience looked on eagerly,
Like race track veterans
Waiting to decide on the steed that they would
Put all hope and support into for a victory.

"Ladies and Gentlemen,
Place your votes."





Oh, tell me Professor Fine
Just what is this grade of mine?
Did I know all that I should?
Did I do more than the others would?

Oh, tell me did I make an A?
How my heart begins to race!
As we come face to face
Papers carried like a mace.

Oh, what is this thing that bleeds?
And how terrible my fate can be
How could I have made a D???



Oh you genius among those fools
who don't contain the intelligence
that you possess from your learned schools
that taught you your belligerence
towards the product of a scared
and dying old man grasping futilely
at any straw of future hope and feared
a fate far worse than yours. Really?

It must be lonely to believe
in no one but you,
and when solitude grants you no reprieve,
whom do you have to talk to?
Yourself, I suppose, is the only
person who understands your toils and fears.

I talk to my father when I am lonely,
talking to one's self to me seems queer.
You are a bastard by choice
for you willingly forsook your father

and foolishly decided to rejoice
in his death. I wonder why he bothered
to make you in his image from sand
and lovingly breathe his life into your soul.

Oh, I forgot, you don't have a soul and
from the womb of an ape your life you stole.
But who made the apes? Surely they
did not originate from the air.

Oh, sorry, in my ignorance I forgot the day
when the "Big Boom" decided to bear
you and your brothers in man,
but if there was a boom, who
do you believe made it? Louder, for I can
not hear your intelligence prove
itself for this final test
of your belief. What? You don't know yet,
and who made my God? Surely you jest





Why don't you ask him yourself? Oh, I forget
that you talk to yourself to procure
your brilliant mortal mind.
Well, you talk to your creator,
and I'll talk to mine.

oice
r father



Brian Pachuca

FUNKY TOWN BLUES



Let me drag you through streets
crossing and curving in downtown, Houston
Down Main, up Congress,
Ascending at top speed seventy-five stories,
In the Texas Commerce Tower
Where high above we see
The Astrodome like Mecca to the east
And old Emerson with his servants
Below him gazing blankly
At his crown, gold and majestic
A bouquet of pale pillars and bare pyres.

We're descending in a rumbling quake of cables
Straining, and our nostrils sting with
Stale fresheners;

We feel our ears popping and our heads throbbing,
So I'll drag you away from these basking towers
In through Milam, out through Congress,
Across this park so lifeless

Where none but the curious disturb sleeping meters
In their red pouches masterlock secure.

Burns is immortal, boldface since 1883
As his name stares stoic above merchant stores,
Starving and running down.
Gaze into these hollow musty tombs
As vagabond monarchs sleep in nests
Empty bottles and garbage bins shrouding
Their presence.

Feel that deadly whiff of fuel exhaust
Trailing a Metro bus passing
Catching us as we stagger
Onward swaggering
Through streets crossing and curving
In downtown, Houston.



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Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Institutional Division (TDCJ-ID) is a name we have all heard, a place that has amazed and fascinated me most of my life. But the inside of those big, brick walls was a mystery to me until four years ago.

On September 2, 1986, I walked through the tall, steel gate. It clanged shut behind me, signaling my new life. I was surrounded by men dressed in white who lived behind bars. This was my job, to guard these men. I did not know whether to feel superior or scared. Regardless, I knew that I had to start off on the right foot or I would never make it in this private world. As I started down the hallway, soon to be known to me as the "run," I realized I was in an environment which exceeded my expectations. The noise level and the corrupted language went beyond my wildest imaginings. Inmates hollered and yelled prison slang I thought I would never understand. I examined several of the prisoners sealed within

their cells. The horror stories I had heard about gangs in prisons were true. Gang members marked themselves everywhere, from head to toe, with tattoos symbolizing their membership in a gang. The gangs were separated by race and color: Aryan Brotherhood for white inmates, Texas Syndicate for hispanic inmates, and Mandingo Warriors for black inmates. The designs of the tattoo differed for each gang. The Aryan Brotherhood used two side-by-side lightning bolts. The Texas Syndicate tattooed a T.S. on their body. The Mandingo Warriors used a knife with blood dripping from the tip, symbolic of membership. Not all inmates were involved in gang-related activities. I could not believe that a department the size of TDCJ-ID would allow this sort of thing to go on. I soon found out that the department could not control the gangs.

Since my employment with TDCJ-ID began, I have had encounters with many different types of inmates. I must constantly look over my



shoulder, never turning my back on an inmate. It does not matter how friendly or trustworthy an inmate may seem, most inmates will con you and play games with you. In the prison setting, officers must look out for each other to survive.

One day, while carrying food trays to the inmates, I heard some commotion from the row above. When I looked up, I saw some shiny material thrown down toward me. It fell into my eye. Little, fine strips of metal cut the insides of my eye, making my head throb with extreme pain. Incredible anger grew inside of me, changing my attitude toward these inmates immediately. For the next two months, I went back and forth to Houston for specialized eye treatments. At the time of this incident I was attending Sam Houston State University and pledging a fraternity. A guy who dressed in white and lived behind bars caused me to resign from school and withdraw my fraternity pledge, my two main goals since graduating from high school.

Later that same year, I observed an incident that changed my feelings toward my fellow

man. It started out as a normal day. We were recreating a cell block of segregated gang members. The different gangs were placed in fenced yards called cages. Each gang had its own recreation yard. Three officers walked outside the cages with riot batons to try to keep the peace between the different gang members. The inmates had been on the yard about twenty minutes when several inmates started hollering obscenities through the cages. Tempers rose. Before we knew it, four inmates scaled the fence and went into a yard containing an inmate from a different gang. All four of the inmates brandished homemade weapons made from razor blades melted onto toothbrushes. They had concealed the weapons in their lower body cavities to get past security to the yard. The single inmate also had a weapon, and though he tried to defend himself, he failed. All we could do was stand by and watch through the fence separating the inmates and us.

Seeing these types of brutalities every day builds a cold and hard attitude within one's self. Recently, I was driving through my neighborhood





in Houston when I saw a familiar face walking down the sidewalk. An inmate I had guarded for the past year had been released on parole. He saw me. His face showed he had not forgotten me. Once again, I realized the need to continually watch my back.





Without reason, without rhyme
Out of step and out of time,
Turn the knife, but don't say why
Listen to the children cry

Now that they can understand
The actions of a bitter man
A precious visit, and gifts he brings
Of empty promises and love that stings

The threat that he will go away
Because of what the children say
Grips their hearts and brings on tears
Of childish anguish, childish fears

A "sometimes" Dad beats none at all,
They settle for a sometimes call
A "sometimes" gift some holiday,
And hope that it will change one day



Reaching out, they found it burned
When love they gave was not returned
They closed their hearts and played pretend,
It wasn't real, "someday" would end

But "being safe" and "letting go"
Are not the same for kids, you know,
Though "sometimes" is all they ever had
It was for them their only Dad

And now the man will make them choose,
But either way the children lose
They settle for what falls their way,
Or else their Daddy goes away, for good, for ever,
no more — "Someday"

Without reason, without rhyme
Out of step and out of time
Turn the knife but don't say why
Listen to the children cry.





Special Thanks To

The Arts and Humanities Department, Dr. Michael Dressman, Dr. Fabian Worsham, Dr. Dan Jones, Student Publications Advisory Board, the contest judges, and the Academic Computing Lab for allowing us the use of their equipment.

