

DARLINGTON

By

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DEDICATION

To my mother Susie Frazier for her loving support. In addition, I dedicate this narrative
to all those who died unfortunately (and unfairly) from a rope.

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ABSTRACT

Darlington is a collection of short stories showing the effects of lynching in the past, present and future. These stories and poetry are infused with elements of magical realism, fantasy and science-fiction. I chose to write this narrative through these literary genres because they allow me the freedom to move creatively. Speculative fiction (magical realism, science-fiction and fantasy), permits people to be aware of things that “realistic” literature isn’t always able to do. The narratives revolve around a small imaginary town in America and shows how lynching impacts a community over a period of time. By mixing various literary genres and styles, I sought to explore a horrific period in America by showing how various generations within a community have dealt with this dilemma. Often stories that have explored lynching, have examined how it has affected and divided the black community. *Darlington* attempts to show different perspective on the subject and how the victim and victimizer are forever linked by this tragedy. The chapters in *Darlington* are called suites to illustrate a linkage that exist with each story. The stories in *Darlington* are not self contain, but are influenced by previous and ongoing events in the town.

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SUITE ONE: HOODOO IN THE FORREST

Between Florence and Charleston South Carolina, there was a town called Darlington. Rivers flowed with giant trout and catfish swam in the lake. Soil was ripe for harvest; tobacco stood in rows in sunny fields. Fruit and bright colored roses swayed in the breeze.

Once, the sun stopped shining in a particular area of Darlington's forest in which it even snowed in August. Deer roamed its grounds for fruit fallen from a tree. I know this tree well. It grows bright red apples and is the only tree in winter to do so: gold colored roses, daffodils; lilies grew underneath my dangling feet. Oh, the fragrance that filled the air was lovely. It was here where seven men wearing white sheets came. They saw me praying with bones on my neck, speaking in tongues over a small fire. I heard the gallop of horses behind me and stayed waiting.

Later, when I was alone I slept. I dreamt of fish swimming across my body as I flowed down a current. I saw so many other poor souls at the bottom of the lake. (If blacks knew what was here at the bottom of the water they would stop holding Baptist revivals or let their young swim here during the summer.) I saw skeletons dressed in suits: one lifted his hand to touch me. But a current pulled me away, before I could learn how they ended up at the bottom.

Each morning the sun rose and kissed Angela on each side of her fair cheek. Angela Lovely grew up in a cozy home. A green clipped lawn. Toys littered her parents' front porch. The sound of crickets croaking in the evening was irritating to her, the drab

dinners and the town's picnics. She was bored by carnivals where boys kissed a girl on the cheek for pennies. Her parents wondered why their dainty blue-eyed princess was always complaining. To Angela the town cared only how much milk they could get from a cow or how the vegetables were doing at harvest time. Her parents would find Angela stretched out on her bed snoring. Angela knew no other way to make time pass quickly in Darlington. Snuggling with her teddy bears on her feathered filled pillows she went to bed thinking of a place in the city where she would one day live and enjoy herself. Hoping her parents would send her to live with her relatives in the North, she told them a lie.

"No. How could he and nobody noticed?" a girl in the yard at school asked her.

"He did too."

"How?" Angela noticed how the girls in the school yard listened

"Why didn't you tell anybody?" another girl wearing ribbons said.

"Because nobody would believe me."

"They would if you told the sheriff. How come your folks didn't know about it?"

"Then what else happened?" a girl in the school yard asked her.

"When I tried to cry for help nothing would come out; I became mute." She told them he how he (I) dressed when she saw him (me) in the forest; "he wore torn clothes and had a grisly laugh. His horse had nostrils like it was sniffing the air over a fire. The girls walked her home while it was sunny.

When the last light in Darlington was turned off that evening, all the young ladies screamed and began having similar visions. The men in Darlington listened to their daughters' fearful wails. Seven towns' men sat down and took a vote.

Angela's father and five other men from the town dressed themselves in white linen sheets and went into the forest to get me. They carried lanterns into the forest with the grand wizard who wore red rode on a black stallion. They looked like bogey men, galloping on top of horses, disturbing the night creatures from their hiding places beneath the rocks of crevasses. Bed sheets snapped in the wind. Angela stayed at home with her mother as the seven horsemen went into the woods to find the man haunting their daughters. She watched them ride away, while dust gathered into a thick cloud above her bedroom window. When it cleared, the mob disappeared.

In the forest, I heard the gallop of hooves beat fiercely on the ground behind me. A face suddenly appeared in the fire I was praying to as I was throwing spices into the flames. It was then a voice spoke. It told me to stay and not fear of their coming.

"Where did they go?" Angel asked her mother, while dusting off her face with a handkerchief. She cleaned her face until it was fair and pretty like before; she patted it with white powder until each side of her cheek returned to its glow.

"Why to get a present, darling. Now go to bed," her Ma said as the sound of horses' hooves faded into the forest. Angela, the "princess of North Darlington" she was called, laid lazily with her teddy bear on her feather filled pillow. A brown furry bear, she squeezed him, blaming Mr. Billy for what she did.

"I was a bad girl. No...I won't hurt you again." Angela once tore out the. But she wouldn't do that again. Mr. Billy was her only friend in Darlington. Her parents replaced her last bear she damaged; she told them how a scrawny cat clawed through her window

tearing the first Mr. Billy to pieces. Angela pretended Mr. Billy could hear everything it told him. A small grin stitched into its soft fury brown face. She wished its arms could wrap its self around her dainty body.

“You should have told me to stop going out at night to play with that John in the forest,” waving her painted red finger at Mr. Billy.

“I was beside myself Mr. Billy. How could I not take a walk with John through the forest? Black wavy hair, arms hugging me,” she told him. She hoped the forest would keep her secret covered. She thought of the eagle that soared over her, did it hear Angela climax and tell everyone what she did? No. That evening, the shrieks of nails were being hammered into the roof of a new house.

“I must be more careful in the future,” she told herself. She sat on the edge of her bed thinking about the changes she noticed in the neighborhood Girls with dirt stuck beneath the soles of their bare came and saw her sitting the porch “Who are you going to go in the woods with now that John moved to New York?” a girl asked Angela.

Angela was flabbergasted. She dare not make a fuss, she told herself. So, just like the lady she thought she was, stopped the rocking of the chair on her front porch with her black patted shoe. She left the porch pretending not to hear a word. Angela lay on her bed with Teddy and thought of how she could go away too. Weren’t their folks in the North?

In the middle of the night a scream was heard deep in the woods. Angela sprung up from her bed panting like she was submerged in a lake. Strands of yellow hair were scattered across her white sheets. The teddy bears she placed to guard her sat around and

did nothing to protect her. Bluebirds and robins chirps sliced the air. The clock in the ivy-covered church tower stopped ticking. Angela saw a flock of crows fly by her window. Waiting alone, upstairs by her window sill I came to give Angela comfort.

Mr. Billy turned its head and told Angela her daddy was never returning. She stared at it; a scream wanting to jump out clogged her throat. I told Angela her daddy wouldn't be coming home. Angela shook herself to see if she was dreaming. She heard a flutter of white crows outside her window: a piece of white fabric and strands of yellow hair were gripped in its claws.

As the seven horse men galloped back into Darlington after hanging me, one stopped them from behind -- the Grand Wizard. The horse moved, making him rock back and forth on top of his stallion.

"We shouldn't just leave him up there on a tree. Maybe one of the kids at school might see him," the wizard said.

"You know how far away we are from town. These kids don't walk around here."

"Yeah, he's right, we shouldn't just hang him up there on the maple tree."

"We have always left the bodies hanging from a tree. Lets people know we mean business."

Dressed in red silk, the grand Wizard continued talking. "Aren't we supposed to cut off his head and put a stake into his heart or something?"

"That is done if it is a vampire or werewolf," another sheeted face recalled.

“No, fool,” said another blanketed face amongst the seven. “He’s right! You saw those bones on his chest. We need his head also.”

“I think we should cut his head off, and then throw his body into a fire. He’s dead for sure,” the Grand Wizard said holding up his reins on his agitated horse.

“Since when you learned so much on how to kill a colored? I think we need to get on home and stop all this nonsense. One thing I can say is that a colored can die just like I can. After what we did, I can’t see any man living through it. He must be dead.” A horse sneezed and looked for food to nibble on the road as the men contemplated what to do next.

“Yeah, he would be. Can never be too sure what can kill a devil walking on earth. One thing is for sure: if we cut off his head what do we do with it then?”

“Throw it onto the fire, fool.”

“When the fool was up there,” the Wizard spoke, “who knows if he was pretending to be dead until we left. Remember that fellow in Huntington County. Wore the same necklace like the one we hung on the tree. Folks said their crops were dry and the animals started attacking their owners. Something wasn’t right about that fellow...”

“Yeah...I heard it too.”

“Folks in the town went crazy fool. Seeing that nigger praying over the fire and singing. Strange the way the flames took on images of faces when we approached him.”

They were silent.

Another hooded man spoke, “we should just go on home.”

“You ain’t scared of that boy are you,” another said giggling behind his white cloth. Red eye sparkled out the holes of his hood.

“Ain’t too late to go back, “the Wizard yelled.

“Did you see how those flames just stopped when we put our hands around him? Just stopped as if you threw a bucket of water on top of it. Never lynched a colored so strange in these parts.”

“You think he came from somewhere out of the sky,” and they all looked up at the stars wondering if I came from some far and distance planet, flying down on a comet. Dust lay thick on their white outfits as they wondered if I was still living.

“He never hollered when I tied that rope around his neck. Just smiled at me. I never had that before. The ones I lynched hollered and called on the name of the lord to help them. This one seemed like he was ready for us to come. Red painted across his body. Do you think it was human blood?”

“What else could it been...just sounds so much like the nigger in Huntington. Black body swinging on the tree didn’t even scream. I thought he pray for mercy, but just let us do our thing. I say we return and finish what we came to do. Won’t take long to do it.” A breeze came from a hill, knocking leaves from trees on their heads. The wind whipping their white laundry: *Come and get me.*

“Who said that,” the Wizard said trying to keep his stallion steady, its hooves kicking stones on the ground.

“Let’s go.”

The horses ran back to catch their hanging trophy. Dust clinging on their sheets, the sounds of their heaving blowing through nostrils. Smoke exhaling from their horse's mouth. They slowed down their horses as they near where they thought I was still hanging.

"I knew it. Gone," the Wizard pulled out a flask of whiskey emptying it before he threw it into the weeds.

"My grandma told me about Huntington. Said when a pig started to talk to her, she left the town and moved here."

"What?"

"Yes. A pig. She said it tore off three of her fingers."

A coal-colored boy, with paint drawn on his face and body, kneeling and waving his hands over a small fire. The Wizard shuddered at what he remembered.

"Well...that settles it." And in the darkness I waited amongst the trees and owls and the ragged bushes for them to find me. The dry scent of pine wood smelled lovely.

"For Christ's sake, we hung him in the tree and waited until he stopped shaking."

"Where you think he got those bones at? They looked human to me. Don't it?"

"Let's go back and finish this," the grand Wizard yelled.

And their horses returned to the tree they thought I was still hung under.

"Where in the hell did he go?" The seven men looked and back tracked their steps to be sure that it was the right area.

The Wizard spoke. "He just fell, probably, that's all. He most likely rolled somewhere over there in the grass. Let's get off these horses and see where he might be. The rope is there so I doubt if he could have rolled that far off."

"All the years I have done lynching, I never seen one come down and walk off a tree," one of the seven said. The Wizard broke them up into search parties of twos and sent them all scurrying into the woods.

"Come back in ten minutes," the Wizard called beneath his red hood. As the red horseman stood alone under the hanging tree with a lantern, the horses began to rush off into the darkness after hearing frightful screams come from deep within the forest. The Wizard clumsily tried to hold their reins together.

After the time had passed, he walked around and squinted in the dark trying to see if the other men were coming.

"You got two minutes left," the Grand Wizard yelled. He waved a lantern in the air so the others would not forget where to return.

"Alright. I give you a few more minutes to come before I get you." Alone he waited against the trees. The light fought to stay lit. A long bloody rope dangled from a tree branch. He tried to grab a hold of it. He missed.

The Wizard yelled into the forest that their time had ended.

"It's time to get back." The light of the lantern began to dim and waver in the wind. Winds from the lake came and blew out the light he hoped would illuminate his path back home. He lit it again, but the fire was losing its fight with the wind.

He walked for twenty minutes and stopped against a tree to catch his breath. “By God! I GOT NO FURTHER THAN I WAS BEFORE,” he yelled.

He walked in a circle.

“I’m here if you still want to come back home,” he called. He sat down beneath a tree and the thought of what he would say when the men returned to him.

I told them they had ten minutes. I can’t wait to hear their excuses when they return to me. I’ll show them, to take off like they done. And he raised himself from the ground and called out to the horses that deserted him in the forest thinking they would return.

“But what if he comes back to get me? The fool we hung is probably waiting to get me.” He pointed his rifle high into the air and started firing until his gun ran empty.

“Come out here,” the Wizard called. Fight me where I can see you.” The color of his red robe illuminated the greens on the bushes.

“Good Lord. What did we kill?” The Wizard thought.

A month passed. Days went by even quicker.

People began complaining of hearing a loud scream echoing inside their brain at night and sometimes during the day. Doctors were sent from all over to find a cure. They gave them aspirins, told them to take a walk to take their minds off things. But as each month passed, the noise grew with intensity. It would be a soft shrill, and then become loud and vicious. They said the noise became worse when they went to bed. Children went to school and stare at their teacher, who stared back with a blank face.

Before autumn, people began leaving Darlington in droves. They packed their belongings into wagons and looked to run from the crows that ate away the town. Folks moved thinking they could forget the travesty of that night, to escape the noise that refused to go away, but it would haunt them to old age.

Angela waits for her father by her window sill. She counts each leaf before it touches the ground. Twisting and turning leaves fall until the trees are naked. Her face has bags with dark circles underneath, while she rocks back and forth whispering, “I ain’t going anywhere, till I get me my present...I ain’t going anywhere, till I get my present....I ain’t going to sleep, till my daddy brings me my gift like he promised ...”

After three years of waiting Angela walked down her staircase lead by men wearing white surgical outfits.

“What about Daddy? I want to stay until he returns,” her blue eyes turned gray. Angela began to look like her mother’s sister. Upstairs she left Mr. Bill dangling on a rope.

SUITE TWO: GOING TO SEE THE WIZARD

The Reporter from the Amsterdam News came off the train and looked at his directions on his Blackberry. He was a short distance from where the Klansman lived. It took him three years to find him. The journalist was anxious to know how a lynching made six Klansmen disappeared. He thought about how Harvey Milk, Martin Luther King and Gandhi were slaughtered; “And this man gets to live,” the reporter thought to himself, walking to the home of the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. On his lapel of his tweed blazer, the reporter wore a button that said, “Yes We Can!” The vigor he felt last week, a new black president, made him feel like he could do anything. He felt free to go to the places his parents were afraid to travel. The reporter rented a red convertible and stepped out to a gray two story house held up by columns. Acorns fell on his thick shoulders, while orange and brown leaves fell around him. The aging Grand Wizard thought six men of his lost fellow Klansmen lost in the woods were trying to get him. The Wizard was angry in his letters, blaming the deputy in town for not taking him seriously. A fog circled the grounds. Weeds grew wild out of the front gate. A tree had fallen into the front yard. He climbed over it to reach the unlit porch. Walking over the tree that stood in his path, he came to the front door and noticed the windows had thick metal bars.

The journalist rang the doorbell first. There was no answer. He knocked his fist against the door and heard feet come feebly down a staircase. There was a wheezing behind the door. A whimpering voice asked who it was.

“I’m Daryl. I was sent by the Amsterdam News to speak to the Wizard.”

An old pale-faced man in a black tuxedo appeared when the door opened. The butler held a flash light in his hand for the house was bathed in darkness. .

“The lightning knocked out our power,” his voice echoed in the dark.

“I hope this won’t infringe on your work.” He greeted the reporter with a cold handshake.

“We are expecting you. The Wizard didn’t think you come on time,” he said as he let the journalist enter the dark foyer.

“May I take your coat?” Then he pointed his string bean arm towards a crumbling staircase leading to a locked metal door upstairs. A chandelier covered in cobwebs swayed back and forth in the ceiling when a lightning bolt sliced the air.

“He feels most comfortable up there behind the metal doors. May I?” The butler reached for Daryl Tote Bag.

“No thank...” Daryl pulled back his hand. “The materials I am using are inside. I will leave my coat own.”

“As you wish.” He followed the butler up the flight of stairs feeling as though he would fall through its cracks. The flashlight showed old portraits covered in cobwebs. “And who is this portrait of?” The reporter asked walking up the wobbly staircase. He placed his free hand on the railing.

“It was his first born son, David. He was trampled over by six horses.”

“And this one...who is this young girl?”

“Why her name was Elizabeth, I was told by the last worker. She went swimming in the lake and drowned. She was six. Strangest thing I ever heard. They found her at the bottom of the water held by the arms of a skeleton around her chest.”

If she never drowned imagine those people would remain undiscovered. “Shall we.” They both advanced to the Wizard’s door. A loud noise was heard below. “I will

have to clean that up later.” The butler looking down at the chandelier that shattered to pieces. He knocked on the door with his free hand. There was a wheezing behind the door. The Wizard asked who it was.

“It is the nigger--it is the journalist from New York, sir. He has come.” The door creaked on its metal hinges before it opened. An old man appeared with gray hair covering his face and frail shoulders.

“He is here,” the Wizard said trying to contain his excitement. A bony man wrapped in a red blanket returned to his seat by the window. Rain came hammering on the house.

“Have a seat.” There was a candle that struggled to stay lit on an oak table: the light cast moving shadows on the walls.

“I will be downstairs in case I’m needed,” the butler said, before closing the metal lab into its hinges.

Daryl’s body shook when the door shut. He was left alone with the.

All this time he had waited and now his feet trembled in fear before the aging Wizard. He took out his digital recorder, and placed it on a filthy oak table.

So prepared he was before, but forgotten what question he should start with first.

“The body we hung was gone when returned. There was a rope that still hung on the branch of a tree. But he was long gone.”

“Why did you return to the tree if you had already killed him?”

“To cut the coon’s head off.”

“You said he had on bones on a necklace when you saw him praying over a fire.”

“Yeah he did. And spoke in a voice I hadn’t heard anyone in those parts use before. We thought he was the devil and wanted him gone from the forest.”

“Could someone have untied him? One of the six who rode with you that evening?”

“No. Because we all rode back to town together. I knew we should have cut off his head when we left the first time, but it was too late.”

“What happened to the others you came with?”

“I waited and waited, but they didn’t come back. Sometimes I see them in dreams calling for me to come join them. I hear them speaking to me because I abandoned them in the forest; they are angry because they think I just gone off and left them. I never deserted my men. Hear me! He took them. The nigger with the bones around his neck.”

“Did they look like this?” and from his tote bag a necklace of bones was held up before the Wizard.

“How the hell did you get that?”

“It was found by children playing in the forest. Does it look like what the man was wearing?” The reporter held the necklace up towards the glow of the candles.

“That looks like it,” the Wizard said trembling beneath the covers. He cried-- Daryl had a handkerchief in his pocket, but refused to give it to this man to wipe away his sorrow.

“I see the nigger laughing at me sometimes when I sleep.” The door opened. It was the butler carrying a cup of water and pills on a metal tray. He placed it on the table without looking once at the reporter and left.

“He was singing when we saw him praying over the fire. Never saw so much courage in a man before he died.”

“Did it sound something like this?” The recorder was played back and the Wizard stood up and listened.

“Yeah. It sounded like that.”

He turned it off.

“Well, are you going to find him and let us know what he did to my men?”

“Sir, I have no idea where this man you lynched is. I am still looking for him myself.”

“I would do anything so that he leaves me alone and let my men go. He done took them to hell where I can never find them is where he gone. I think they wait until I die.”

“Why do you feel they are waiting for you?”

“I believe the black devil we hung took them with him. Where else could the six be? I couldn’t stay in Darlington because folks thought I left them out there alone.” A tree that was behind the Wizard’s house fell after a bolt of lightning came knocking it into the ground. The Wizard lifted his bony legs and arms bare with spots like a leopard.

“He’s coming for me. Can’t you hear his angry voice in the wind?”

And a wind came shaking the house making everything that he couldn’t see fall around him.

“Could you tell him to go away and leave me alone? I have done well by colored folks since that day. I never lynched one ever again.”

As the reporter began to collect his things, the door opened again. “Is everything ok in here?” the butler asked.” They both looked up at him and with a nod of the Wizard’s head closed the door behind him. The reporter smelled old cigarette smoke and whiskey in the room. “Did anyone see you come, boy?” His nails like claws gripped hard on his cane, scratching the wood with his fingernails. He wore slippers that made a

scratching sound when he moved across the bare floor. “Anytime somebody is around me I love, they get taken away from me.” Silence.

“You think he is still after you?”

“You call me a liar, boy? Of course he is. He took my children. I heard the coon out there the other day.” As the Wizard spoke, the reporter looked around him to see what else he could find. A bible was on a table and a cross hung on a wall above it.

“I know they are their way.”

“Why do you think so?”

His white shirt was a stark contrast to the soiled robe the old Klansman wore. He began to take off his blazer and looked for a place to lay it, but after looking at the room again he kept it on.

“Are you staying, boy? Go sit.”

The reporter tightened his hand into a fist. He relaxed realizing if he became angry he would be ruining years of work he started. There was a wooden chair that was beside the Wizard. He inspected it before sitting. “My name is Daryl. Daryl Smith, just like I wrote you in the letter.” The Wizard seemed not even to hear Daryl speak, but was lost, remembering events of the past.

“He saved me for last.”

Daryl felt sad for this man who lost his son. But then thought, wasn’t it a good thing to have one less racist around to be bothered with?

“It all started because of him—the nigger. We found him praying and saying strange stuff tossing things into a small fire,” the Wizard became still for a moment. His eyeball twitched in its socket.

“You hear that outside? Did you come alone, boy, like I told you?”

It was difficult to get the man to calm down and tell Daryl more of his story. He was the last one to have seen the hoodoo man, but the constant breeze outside caused him to panic. The journalist thought this man escaped death, never to see the gavel come down in a courtroom. Like a Nazi hiding in America. Where was the justice? The Wizard could not go out and see how the world changed; he was hiding.

“No matter where I looked, I couldn’t stop seeing him, the boy we hung. For years I stayed here and thought they would start looking for me.”

“The police?” Daryl said sarcastically.

He hid buried in this room hoping time would forget him, Daryl thought. He lived in a home that was just like a prison.

“How long have you stayed here?”

“Not long enough it seems.” In the morning, he left the Wizard wheezing in his house. He had questions, which still needed to solve this twisted puzzle.

SUITE THREE: CRYSTAL LAKE

As I watch this lake move before me today, carrying leaves and branches down its currents, I think about the white robe I was dressed in for my baptism. I heard singing, hands clapping and tambourines ringing around me. Yet, it wasn't the baptism that awakened me that sunny day. It was what I saw staring at me from the bottom of the water.

Once, I fell and landed down on a tree branch that cut through my palm. I cried and plunged my hand into the lake. There was a tingling feeling that ran through my body. I felt blood gush out mixing with the waves of the current. Foam came around my arm. My eyes rolled into the back of my head as the water warmed around it. The tree branch that stuck out from my hand came out with ease. I flung it where it hit the bark of an oak tree before shattered then into tiny pieces. I raised my hand to my face – the hole closed in the center. I remembered how the men down at the mill looked—how bits and pieces of their fingers and arms were chewed away when they return home from work.

My people were baptized to be reborn into something better in Darlington, South Carolina. People all over town came to be baptized here. Checker table cloths and white paper plates printed with Dr. Martin Luther King's face.

I stood in a line with other kids; our heads were combed and the girls' hair were braided or straightened. Our preacher, Revered Long, clasped his jeweled fingers on our forehead before bathing us in the warm stream. After a boy was baptized, I stepped

forward, my heart pounding. I remembered, in the brief seconds before I was dunked in seeing a man's face at me.

"You fooling us," Phyllis said. Her hair was always nicely pressed where no kinks would ever grow again. Her skin looked like honey. I sat behind her in class, distracted by her bosom that grew larger each year in school. Nipples pointing out of her blouse like miniature torpedoes. She sat with the other girls at the picnic table that morning. She shrugged her shoulders at what I said, her cotton dress swaying in the cool afternoon breeze of August.

"He looked like he was going to pull me under. Thank god the Reverend Long pulled me up in time before he got to me."

"How come nobody seen him but you?" Phyllis asked string at me flabbergasted. The ladies in their white dresses turned to me for an answer. *Darlington Church Revival*, were printed on blue, red and white balloons filled with helium. The young ladies of Darlington looked at each other to see if I was fibbing.

"What did he say?"

"I wasn't under there long enough for him to say anything," I said.

They all turned toward the lake and stood quietly looking as the boys come up from their baptism.

"He just makes up stuff! Remember how he talked about his hands healing by sticking it into the water?" Phyllis recalled.

"No trust me. I know what happened."

“Stop fooling and go play with the boys when they get finished.” Phyllis said returning back to the work she started.

“How come nobody else saw him?” I was asked.

I had no answer to this question, so I walked away when the other boys were coming in from the lake; they were being congratulated like soldiers returning home from battle. When it was time for the ladies to, Phyllis refused.

“There is a man floating at the bottom of the water,” she yelled.

“What are you talking about, Phyllis,” a woman who played the organ in church asked

“Jacob said there was a man waiting to pull us under.”

And then I felt everyone turn and stare at me. I became the boy who cried wolf in Darlington.

My parents never allowed me to attend another revival function. The smiles I usually received from folks when I was walking were replaced with cold stares—children were scared to sit in their bathtubs because of the things I said. I continued to go for the lake never told me I was a liar. Digging my hands in the pebbles soaked ground, I wanted to find him. Catfish swam around my face as I searched for the man people thought was a figment of my imagination. I held up a handful of stones, while mud oozed down my arms—it looked like a liquid dump I take in the toilet.

For a year, before I was sent to live with family in New York, I would sit on the edge of the lake into nightfall throwing stones to see if I could stir the stranger from

sleeping. I would inhale the scent of pine cones that were scattered on the forest floor, Magnolia blossomed nestling tickling my nostrils. Fireflies, blinking like headlights on a highway, flickering everywhere. Mosquitoes swarmed around my head and shoulders. (I made sure to put spray on me or else they start thinking I was a chocolate cake left on the on the edge of the creek to eat). My eyes strained to see the wings of butterflies as they licked the petals of lilies. Raccoons, owls, and bats sat on tree branches. At times, the engine of a plane would fly above my head, disappearing into clouds that look like bales of cotton. I wish the plane come and rescue me from Darlington's boredom. And take me to a place where a child wasn't afraid of being heard and seen. Dragonflies' bulleted, firing at each other in the air. And behind me in the woods was and still is my favorite tree—the one I lost my virginity under. (Despite my eccentricities I was adored by the ladies). I went many nights to Crystal Lake after that revival.

But one night, when the moon was full, a red dust circled around it. What I begun to think was delusional appeared before me in the flesh. The water opened and a man wearing overalls appeared. I sat looking at the stranger come up. I was stunned. I saw no one come to swim.

At first, he poked his head from the water and looked before going back under. He came up six minutes later and swam to land. I ran, covered by the thick oak trees behind me. An owl hooted on a branch above me.

"Peter," he said into the lake, "You still down in there. Come up. It's safe. The Peckerwoods are long gone." A long rope dangled around his neck. He unhooked it and let it fall on the soil around his muddy boots.

“Who is there? Peter is that you?” the man gently called into the forest from where the owl hooted.

“You ain't Pete."Who you?" I rubbed my eyes to see if what was happening was real. He walked to me. I trembled.

“Don't you know boy you shouldn't be running out here by yourself?”

“I ain't no boy.”

“What are you then?” he said.

I could barely look into his eyes for it was night and the moon was covered off and on by clouds. I could hear fear in his voice.

“Did you see a man come out the water, boy? We hid till the Peckerwoods and their dogs were gone.”

“I am no boy,” I said.

“Then what are you? I see now,” he paused. “I never liked to be called boy myself. I got to go find Peter. Get from here.”

“I can go get help. The sheriff---

“They the ones that chased after us.”

“Peter,” he began to whisper into the pool of water facing the forest. “Peter. Where are you? Peter, it's ok to come out. Peter!”

A red pick-up truck drove across a bridge that led into Darlington. Grabbing me from behind the man ducked behind a tree into the forest.

“Stay quiet.” He placed his callused hands over my lips. The car drove away its red lights blinking in the dark. I looked up and noticed a thick rope mark circling his neck.

“You got to be careful out here little man. If they come and find us, they throw us both over these trees branches.”

“Who? How long you been hiding in there?”

“I can’t say if I remember.” Clouds moved allowing the moon to stare at us both.

“Gloria. She worried sick about me I know.” He fell to the ground and sobbed. I put my arms around him and rubbed his back, just like I watched Ma do when Dad drove home from work.

“You mean Old Ms .Gloria and her daughter. Ms. Gloria still lives a few doors down from me. You want me to take you to them.”

“What you mean by old?”

“She sits behind us in church.”

“Go home and tell folks where I am. My name is Horace. Come back quick before the Peckerwoods return.” He jumped back into the water. Bubbles came to the surface. I stood looking to see when he pop-up again. But he didn’t.

“Where are you mister?” I called.

I ran back to Darlington looking for anyone to help. The roads were empty. Phyllis swept her front porch in the dark. Here and there a light shined in a house. The sounds of crickets grew louder as the night thickened in the dark.

“Phyllis,” I said panting, “You have to come down with me to the Crystal Lake. There is a man who needs help!”

“I ain’t going nowhere and doing nothing on a Sunday after I went to church. You know that. The front door slammed behind her. I ran home. Our meager dwelling was clean and freshly painted. Dad’s truck was parked outside; a well oiled pick-up truck. Re-runs of *The Cosby Show* played on our television. I stumbled into the room panting.

“Where have you been? And wipe your feet before you enter!” I stepped out the house and rubbed my black boots on the welcome mat of our house. Dinner waited on the stove.

“You have to come down to Crystal Lake”

“You need to sweep those leaves from the yard, before you say anything more” my Ma said her eyes glued on Bill Cosby.

“You can’t be staying out there like that son,” my Dad said. They wouldn’t listen until I swept the yard.

“You don’t understand. A man with a rope around his neck walked out the lake.”

“Jacob. Stop playing games and go and take care of the yard,” my Father yelled. I went outside pretending that I was sweeping leaves from our yard, but ran over to Ms. Gloria Woods’s home instead. I came to her house and knocked my fist against her door. I heard the sounds of slippers scrape against the floor.

She cracked the door open, and then opened it all the way after seeing it was me.

“You alright? Why ain’t you at home, Jacob?”

“Ms. Gloria. I need you to listen to me. A man, Horace, is at Corral Creek. We need to call up some folks so they can come and help him.”

“What are you talking about Jacob? Horace died years ago. You weren’t even thinking about being born. Get your fibbing tail home boy, before the devil comes and get you. Go. You should be ashamed of yourself. It’s good your folks are going to send you up North. Running around sneaking in the woods.”

“They were going to do what?” For a moment, I forgot about Mr. Horace.

“He has been gone boy for years. Please go from here Jacob,” I watched her eyes swell and felt ashamed: she showed nothing but love to me and I brought pain to her home that evening. I ran back to Crystal Lake thinking of how I could bring Horace to Darlington to show everyone I was no liar.

I returned, but he was gone. I called to him, while crickets sang between trees. A rope that hung around his neck lay at the edge of the lake. I picked it up—and with the light of the moon; I walked home holding the rope in my palm. I returned to Ms. Gloria in the morning and showed her the rope in my palm. She let out a loud scream and fell face down to the ground

I was sent to New York by the end of the month to stay with my aunt. That was the last month I ever spent in Darlington.

When I returned to Darlington years later to bury my father, it was the first time I went back since showing Ms. Gloria the rope. The wind came lifting a heap of leaves from the yard. Tall gray weeds stretched out into the porch. The bells that hung in our front door made a rustic noise. That night, I walked to Crystal Lake after the funeral,

dressed in a white shirt and black khaki pants. I walked to Crystal Lake and wasn't bothered by the stones eating at my Italian black loafers. When I reached the lake's edge, a flock of crows huddled around the tree where I lost my virginity. ("Jacob and Phyllis" was scribbled on the back of an oak tree). Cigarette boxes, condom wrappers, and broken beer bottles laid on the edge of the grass. The moon's eye stared down on me. I inhaled the air, thinking how this place once made me feel safe. I felt I had unleashed some painful part of the past when I held that rope in my hand. Just when I turned to go home to my mother, to say my farewells to everyone in Darlington before returning home to New York, I heard a man rustle the leaves behind me. I turned and saw Horace.

"Horace?" I called back. He stepped forward and looked just as he did years ago.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"It's me, Jacob, the boy that came here before. You don't remember? It has been a while since I returned."

He looked up and down at me. I was older than him. In all the years he seemed not to age. The line that circled his neck was fresh as on the day I last saw it. He looked at me and noticed it was me.

"Boy, you sacred the devil out of me. How come you been gone for so long? I thought you bring help."

I thought if I returned him with me in town I would open an old wound. The town was still my home I wanted peace to stay here. Would I take all that away—the quiet and peacefulness by bringing Horace into town? Wasn't it best to leave the past buried underwater?

“Ms. Gloria left a long time ago.”

“She did? Where she go?”

“I don’t know. How long are you going to stay out here?”

Horace sat at the edge of the lake. Branches, sun burnt leaves floated on water. A fish jumped and plunge biting at insects flying over the water.

Horace stared into the water as he spoke and spoke in mournful voice.

“I promised myself never to leave this forest unless we left together.

I wanted to take him back to Darlington. Who was to upset the quiet that had now settled over South Darlington? Does one open a coffin after it’s buried? No...let the town rest in peace.

The rope burn, his twisted mouth, bulging eyes turned to me in the dark. Let the past stayed buried, I thought. Allow the waters to cover the pain the town felt after his passing. To reopened a wound that so many people have bandaged. I would be as cruel as the men who killed Horace. Let Darlington stay sleeping.

Horace stepped out of the woods and walked slowly into the water circling in the middle of the water; it rose until it covered his head. Slowly as the water covered his head, peace returned to me. R.I.P I whispered.

SUITE FOUR: A TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL

"I am confident that there truly is such a thing as living again, that the living spring from the dead, and that the souls of the dead are in existence." —**Socrates**

"I am certain that I have been here as I am now a thousand times before, and I hope to return a thousand times." - **Goethe**

Horace hears a fog horn blare from a boat sailing in the lake. He gazes at the ship's four white masts that billowed in the air like a white shirt on a clothes pin. A clamor of horns resounded in the lake setting the sparrows hiding in the trees soaring. A ship sailed docking at the shore where a family of three waited. A big wooden boat went sailing down the water knocking down the limbs of a magnolia tree hanging over the river.

A family of three waits at the edge of the lake limbs and branches of trees float down the water's passage. The ship, her slow stern, rolled into the lake poised down the murky water where oak trees swayed in the waft. It was night, and the three waited with mud-stained feet and ankles. Their string bean arms hung loosely besides their shattered bodies.

A small boy rocked back and forth on his muddy feet. His back showed a tattered pajama top torn to pieces. Bruises streaked down his back like train tracks going down a jagged hill.

A wind ruffled the woman's prairie dress showing thick big welts running down each brown leg. Her flowed up and down like white curtains hanging in a window. As the vessel dropped its anchor a splash of water fell onto the soil. Tongue shaped leaves stuck on their bare feet. The breeze stirred though the forest where the owls, raccoons were

stirred by the banter of the ship's horn. Behind them, in the thick of the woods, Horace sat staring at the ship.

A lantern moved on the top deck without showing its owner. Two young men came down the plank. A badge was pinned on a black coat of a lapel of one boy: **Emit Till**. A red carnation dropped out of his penny shaped pocket. His swollen belly stuck out making the buttons seem as if they would pop out.

Emit started calling out names of people on a clipboard.

The man standing beside the woman and child waved his hand when his name was called, "Here I am," he yelled.

"First, we apologize for coming so late," Emit said as the second horn blared.

"A terrible storm came and through us off course," he made notations on a clipboard. The boy squeezed the woman's hand pulling her to return back into the bushes. Bats swarmed around the top of the ship's upper deck.

"Oh it's ok young fellow," Emit said. "They don't bite." He stretched his hand out to the timid boy, but the child gripped harder on the woman's skirt.

"I'm Captain Emit Till. Fog, rain storms, tidal waves. You can't do a job like this without something happening. I guess you been out here wandering by yourself so much you figured it always be home. Come. I will take you somewhere so that you can rest in peace forever."

"Are you Horace?" Emit asked. He walked into the woods where Horace sat. Emit smiled; his teeth were cracked and yellow. As Emit spoke, water dripped from his mouth like a faucet. The lantern holder rocked back and forth on his feet. Dragon flies

swerved around the lighted beam. He raised the lantern higher as the ship's captain crossed away things on a wrinkled brown paper. Horace stepped out from behind an Oak Tree. A bat sat rigid on his sunken shoulder.

"That's me. You want something?"

"We are waiting," the ship's captain said

"I'm fine here."

Horace scanned the forest and thought it felt like living in a coffin. He hid there in the forest like a ground hog popping out to see if danger was coming. The wind whined through the maple trees that bended over the lake's basin. Horace stared at the night's constellation counting the stars twinkling in the moonlit.

In winter, Horace observed how the branches bended under the weight of snow. In spring—buds grew on tree branches and the warm of the wind melted away the icicles.

The lantern made Horace's shadow move when the light touched him.

"Where are you going?"

"A land called 'Rest in Peace.' There is an ivory castle with yams planted in fields; cows roaming in green thick pastures. Trees filled with honey. Come, before a storm returns and throws my ship off course." Horace smiled thinking he never would be chased down a forest like a possum.

"You awful young to be driving a ship," Horace said. The boy holding the lantern opened his mouth to talk.

" 'e bett'r g't ba'k or befor' anoth'r sto'm comes?"

"What did he say?" Horace asked Emit.

“Oh. Just that we need to get moving before a storm comes again and throws us off schedule.”

“I 'ate to be lat' goin' places, Emit.”

“Is it my fault? Be patient will you. You ready?” He said to Horace.

The bat shrieked at Emit. “Down boy. He ain't going to do nothing to you?”

Horace messaged the bats furry head. A wind shook the apples dangling from an elm tree; they rolled over brown, orange and yellow leaves. A bolt of lightning cracked the air. They looked up and saw a flock of sparrows flying in the wind.

“I to'd u it was comin'. Look See. You fo'l, I told you.”

“I can see very well. Just settle down.” He returned speaking to Horace. “So are you ready to join us. You can come. It beats roaming the woods.” The lantern sputtered light on the ground; the branches and leaves threw intricate shadows on Horace's brown sad face.

“W' nee' to get—,”

“I know. I know. Just hold on a minute. See Horace. Now you got him all riled up. Are you coming?” Horace began to think of Darlington and the last night he was there:

A gold star shined on a blue uniform. A flashlight scanned the lake. A cigar was bit between two pork lips. Smoke rings rose before vanishing in the breeze. A pair of blue eyes twinkled in the dark.

The shadow of a hawk grabbed a snake slithering between stones. The snake shook in the Hawk's claws.

“Rest in Peace is beautiful. You will never have to fear anything again. There is a tall castle where you can prop your feet up in bed and lay your head on a pillow.”

“Really?” Horace smiled. He thought of all the visions he had played over and over again like a record. They haunted him like a rain drenched cloud hovering over him.

“Let’s go. I’m ready. Wait one second. My friend Pete was out here too. Do you know where he went? I can’t leave without him. Wouldn’t feel right if I abandoned him and not know where he went.”

“He probably at Rest in Peace waiting to see you my friend. Right now we need to get going.”

As the men walked up the ship’s plank the anchor was pulled out the lake. A wind blew the mast of the ship. Horace went to the lower deck first where wooden pews were emptied, splintered. The steps felt like they would cave in at any moment; they shook beneath his feet. A foul smell bit his nostrils. Horace returned upstairs, “When was the last time somebody cleaned it?” He asked the lantern man who stared ahead like a statue. Horace tried speaking to the people who boarded first, but they sat mute on the ship’s top deck. The moon was like a silver coin glittering in the sky giving off shining dots that sprinkled on the ship’s platform. Thick braided ropes swung in the air. As the vessel sailed, Horace saw clouds floating above the surface.

The boat rumbled. The sea sounded like it was moaning with the voices of the dead. Horace was surprise Emit was able to steer the ship in the clouded air. Horace

gripped the ship's wooden rail to balance himself. As the ship moved through the bumpy water, Horace caught glimpses of things moving around him.

"Where is that ship heading?" Horace pointed to a ship that had a symbol scrolled across its wooden boards: Rest in Peace. A man in a black rain coat steered the wheel and waved to Emit as he passed him.

"Where is that ship going?" Horace yelled. The sea's banter swallowed Horace's question from reaching Emit's ears.

"Hold on to something otherwise you will be knocked into the water," Emit said. A wet blanket of water fell on the ship's top deck snatching away the family he boarded with. The sounds of cries were swallowed away. The family was sucked away like dirty dish water going down a faucet.

Horace tightened his hand on the rail, "I told them to go to the bottom deck. Nobody wants to listen," Emit said. "Don't worry any. There is a boat that comes and picks up lost souls on that middle passage."

"Here we are," the ship halted in front of new land. Emit escorted Horace out the ship and walked down the splintered boards that rolled to the soil like a spiteful child poking out its tongue.

"Well. You enjoy. My job is done. Just start walking until you'll see a tall castle." Horace rubbed his eyes trying to see where he was. The forest: raccoons jumped-up and down trees—its whiskers long like a cartoon mouse. Bats were perched on branches. Purple lilies swayed on the edge of the water. Butterflies hummed over daffodils. Bumble

bees flew around orchids. A phoenix soared in and out of the bushes leaving circles of smoke swimming around the top of oak trees.

There were tall pointed mountains, green bushy leaves sprouted out across the terrain. As the moon glowed the wind ruffled his blue shirt. Tangerines fell down as he pushed through a thick canopy of trees. There was a sign that pointed to a place called New Spirit Castle.

“Why didn’t Emit mention anything about this? Where do I go so I can Rest in Peace forever?” Acorns, pinecones made crushing noises beneath his thick black boots.

“Hey,” he said to a man wearing overalls. Horace peered into the man’s face.

“How did you get here?” the man asked him

“A Peckerwood got angry when I opened a store in town. He took me and my friend Pete away. They placed long thick ropes around our necks. We heard crickets moaning and dogs barking in the dark. They pulled on the rope, like we were dogs on a leash. Just then our prayers seemed to be answered. The two hound dogs ran away into the woods chasing a squirrel. The men chased after it, thinking we would wait for them to return. Ropes bit into our flesh while I untied it. I pulled the sack off my head and did the same for Pete who was busy calling on Angels to save us.”

“Do you know where the castle Rest in Peace is at?”

“You must be looking for the New Spirit Castle. Don’t get worked up about it either. Just keep walking down this path and you will find it”

“What you mean man?”

“Go on ahead. You will see. All they do they do is pour old souls into new bodies”

“What do you mean?”

“Just go on ahead and find out yourself. After standing on line, I slipped down the stairs and snuck out the door before anyone could see me. I heard them talking about returning people’s souls to the land of the living. From what I heard standing out here, they got new things out there to kill you. Diseases that make you grow old before your thirty. There was young boy in his twenties. I was told his legs were thin like a lamppost and spots ran up and down his young body. Scares me to think how that can look on someone. No, no! I will wait for the next ship to come.” And the man pouted off into the wilderness.

“I think you should give things a chance,” Horace yelled.

Would Horace’s flesh return poor, blind, deaf, and dumb when his feet stepped again on the South Carolina soil? What would happen to him if he did go back to earth in the form of someone else? I might come back as a prophet, he thought. Or be someone who is rich and famous. Horace kept walking.

Horace stood quietly behind an oak tree shivering. The leaves and branches of trees covered the sky above his head. He stared at the castle, thinking that it wasn’t quite ivory. What should he do next? Doves swerved around a maple tree as Horace eased on down a yellow brick road leading towards the castle. The grass was manicured. He put his nose over a rose and smelt its fragrance tickle his nostrils. There was a calf suckling

milk from its mother. "God, how I miss my wife," he thought. A young man sat on the grass; he had bulging eyes and a twisted mouth.

"Is this where I can lie down and Rest in Peace forever," Horace asked, pointing to the castle.

"Rest in Peace forever? Where is that at? I'll keep my tail out here if I was you. I think it a whole lot better too. You can walk around where ever you want to here and nobody isn't coming after you because you owe them money." Here and there was a hoot from an owl. The man stood and walked off into the woods.

"Damn fool." Horace thought to himself. High above on a hill there was a gray castle. "Welcome to the castle in the sky," Horace darted towards it. The leaves of a weeping willow sprinkled buds on his head and shoulders. When he reached the bottom of the castle, the sun chased away the darkness that bathed the territory. A rainbow arch stretched over the top of the gray facade. Tulips and daffodils sprouted around Horace's booted feet kissing the ground beneath his feet.

He came to two golden gates, ringing a cow bell that hung on the stone door. A sign was posted on the door: "**There is no death. How can there be death if everything is part of the spirit? The soul never dies and the body is never really alive.**" Horace day dreamed of Darlington.

"We are going to wait here until you come out the water, boy?"

"If you sold your store things wouldn't get nasty like this," said a voice in the crowd.

"Go on. Get him."

The dog sniffed the lake. And ran away.

“That dog isn’t good for shit. Go in Milford,” the second dog jumped in.

“Where it goes?” bubbles floated on the surface.

“Milford?”

Horace heard the man sniffle.

“What’s going on with you?”

“I can’t see Milford?” He began to cry.

“Let’s get on back”

The dog rose from the water growling at his owner.

“Tell him to settle down. Otherwise I’ll quiet him myself.”

“Milford?” The dog leaped at its two owners.

“Let’s haul our ass out of here,” the men retreated into the forest. The dog, waging its wet tail followed. The dog ran back to the lake with blond hair between its jaws.

The hinges on the gray slab of the door made creaking noises. A short fair-skinned stranger stepped behind the door; his hair was like lambskin falling down on his frail shoulders. Before it was opened, Horace thought about Old Darlington.

“We know you jumped in the water. You can’t stay in there forever. Come on out.”

“Go and send the dogs loose.”

“I am not going to let Milford go leaping in there.”

“Then how else we going to find him. Let that dog go in. They done jumped into everything else.”

“You heard what they say about that damn water. Look there he go. The dumb fool jumped over there. See. Look Fool.”

“I can see him running. Yeah, I can see the rope tied around his neck. Let’s go before he dives back in.”

I must have walked to the wrong place. I was looking for a place called rest in peace.” They didn’t tell me a Peckerwood would be guarding the entrance Horace thought quietly to himself.

“We have been waiting for you.” Horace was shocked how he spoke to him; he was kind, gentle.

“May I,” he began to inspect Horace. Like a doctor examining a patient. Horace looked up again at the man’s face; he had blue twinkling eyes and an odd mischievous grin. He turned around and ran like the devil was after him.

“Come back. What is the matter?” the gate keeper yelled. But Horace was far away, running like a convict escaping from jail

“I guess you decided not to go in, huh?” The man returned—with the twisted eyes and bulging mouth.

“Yeah,” a roar came from the bowels of the water. He listened trying to hear if the family was swimming beneath the waves of the current. A thin film of foam floated to the surface like cream over coffee.

“I think I will wait here until another ship comes,” Horace said. “I think it be foolish to return to a world that will always hate me. Who is to say if I will return rich and famous or just be running away from folks because I am “different.” And in the distance, a boat sailed to the area where Horace waited.

SUITE FIVE: HAVE YOU SEEN JAMES GARDNER?

Missing Date: May 10, 1997.

Missing From: Darlington, South Carolina

Date of Birth: May 1, 1985

Hair: Black

Height: 5'9

Eyes: Brown

Gender: Male

Race: African-American

Distinctive Features: A small scar above his naval.

James Gardner was last seen coming home from school in May 1997. Witnesses saw him speak to two men before going into the back seat of a black Cadillac Seville. As James was walking home from school, the car stopped and two men came out. After a short conversation, James entered into the back seat of the car. Two African -American men who were described as being in their late to early fifties. Both dressed in tuxedos. No force was used in the abduction. Jacob is an outstanding student at school who excelled in all his sporting activities, in particular wrestling where he won first place at a school competition. If anyone has any information, please contact 1-800-The Lost.

“Good Lord. I knew you return home one day again.”

“Hi...mom. It's great to be home,” James said hesitating before entering the house. He embraced her gently. Martha stared at her long lost son James, dripping with rain water on her front porch. He grew up to look just like his Daddy, she thought. There was a man sitting behind the wheel of a car that was parked outside of Martha's front porch.

“Come in!” She urged ignoring the four doors of the Cadillac parked in front of her unmanicured lawn, not asking questions for her excitement stayed on her son's return.

They stepped inside the living room of the old house. She held him wrapping both her arms around him while the sound of crickets danced outside her home. She had fixed his bedroom and kept it that way in case he returned home to stay. On his birthdays, she still cooked his favorite dinner: collard greens, macaroni and cheese and fried chicken. And all the folks in Darlington would shake their heads hoping that one day she accepted the truth that her son was gone forever.

“Why, God Lord, look at the time!” It was twelve in the morning according to the clock on the fireplace mantle. She stepped away from her son and eyeballed him. It was him, but she noticed something oddly different. “What on earth happened to you?” She lifted her hand and traced it around the stitches which circled his forehead. James stepped away from her hands. “Who did this to you James?” His head was shaved bald and there was a thick black scar that went from his cheek disappearing going to the back of his neck.

“I can’t stay long mom. I’m sorry I haven’t called and said where I gone,” he spoke low, as if each word had to be pulled from his mouth.

“I knew if I prayed every day you come back to me. Let me call the reverend and folks and tell them you come home! After five years, praise God you’re back home!”

“No. Don’t do that!”

“Why? We need to thank the folks who tried to find you! Are you crazy boy? People are still scared their children might be taken away like you did.”

James’ eyes made loud sounds like the engine of a rusty vehicle. He moved to the window and closed the shade quickly.

“I need to go soon,” he said, “you can’t tell anybody I came to see you.”

“You just got here. What is wrong with you?” she almost hollered.

A high school photo hung beside the image of a white Jesus Christ on a wall.

James was smiling in the photo from his sophomore year, with braces on his teeth. He’d won first place at his high school’s Science Competition. Martha took a step back from her son, James still dripping wet from the rain, “You ain’t James!” she accused. “I must have lost my mind staying up all these nights thinking he return home to me. Who are *you*? Death...coming to finally take me to my grave,” her voice, echoing against the wooden walls of her home.

“It’s me Mom. See,” he lifted his yellow rain coat shirt to show a small scar he had when he fell from a tree as a boy. She remembered how she soothed the pain by cooking him his favorite dinner: collard green macaroni and cheese and fried chicken.

“*It is you.*” She fell back on the couch and began to whisper a quick prayer beneath her breath.

“I need to return before its get too late,” James said, standing over his mother.

“Who would keep a boy from returning home to his mother? This don’t sound right, James. Do you owe someone money? Tell me, so I can give it to them.”

“No! Keep your money mom. Just stop talking to the newspapers and television people”

“What the devil you said? I have never heard any nonsense like this before?” She covered her mouth with both hands, “I thought you be gone from me forever.”

“I can’t stay otherwise the folks come and things might get bad for me. I made an oath to stay for a certain period of time.”

“With who? Tell me boy,” she walked closer to her son to examine his eyes for what he wouldn’t tell her.

James walked over to the window and took a quick peek through the blinds. He turned around to face Martha, who was standing behind him, trembling with terror. A dim night light plugged into a wall of an outlet casted a silhouette around her petite fragile body.

“Who keep a boy away from his mother for so long? Let me go and call--”

“No. What I told you?”

“Lower your voice in this house, James! Just a month ago, two boys went missing from Darlington. Are they with you too, the other boys that vanished? Did they do that to them?” She pointed to the stitches going around his head.

“No...but you need to stop speaking to the television folks. Ok?”

“Who did this to you?” Martha’s eyes glistened as rain fell outside

“What in the world did they do to your eyes?” His eyes were red and empty.

“Have you been getting the checks in the mail?” He asked her while checking to see no one else was inside the house.

“Yeah. I have. Do you need it so those people will let you come back home?”

For years, she went to the morgue to identify young black boys’ bodies, praying it would never be James.

“No. That ain’t him. I know my own son if I saw him.” She watched the prime time news reports and read the papers. She waited to hear if he’d been hung from a tree like his granddaddy. No. He was here, back home, in South Darlington standing before her as a grown man, and she wouldn’t let him go.

“Just sit down here and everything will be ok. Who is that Man out there?” Martha went to the kitchen, her voice trailing off and muffled by the cupboards she opened and closed. A faucet ran cold water into a mason jar. She came out with it clutched in her hands looking for where her son had gone.

“James! Where you go?” The front door was shut.

Just when I thought things were becoming better. The glass slipped from her hands and she bent over to pick the shards out of the bare floor.

“Damn. I broke his favorite jar,” she mumbled to herself.

“James are you upstairs in your bedroom? It’s the same as you left it.”

She glided nimbly to check his small bedroom, and then looked into hers. He was not in the house. She stood up and opened the back door to see if she could catch a glimpse of him. “Where are you?” She called. The car was gone.

She ran recklessly in the house bumping into the sofa, knocking over a table where a figurine of a clown, feeling its smiled mocked her chaos. Beneath her bunny slippers the glass crackled. She flung the front door of the house hoping James was standing outside.

All she saw remembered was seeing a dark silhouette going back into the parked car vanishing behind the rain that continued to hammer on her roof for the rest of the

evening. Martha sat looking at the clown who laid in pieces. She stayed on her sofa, until morning, the sounds of robins outside, while to the anguish that vanished returned once again after James leaving.

Five Years Later

“You come back again. Folks around here thought I was a crazy, but I knew I was no old fool. I stayed up and waited every night that you return home to me again. Are those fools who been holding you let you come home to me to stay?” She looked outside to see if a man was outside in a car; her son came alone.

“Folks come in and check on me worried how I’m doing.”

“I’m sorry Mom.” The scar that had stretched across his head was gone, but the red robotic eyes were the same as before.

“Your head looks better than it did last time you came. I can never be sure with the way my eyes have been acting. Why it looks normal!”

She threw her arms around him.

His eyes began to open and close like the blinds on a window shade.

“You have to stop telling folks that your son is alive. I be home soon. Ok? You will be proud of me after they are done fixing me up good. I learned a whole lot while I was away. You don’t need to worry none. I am going to move you to the house you always wanted.”

“What foolishness do you mean, son? There ain’t nothing here I don’t already have. I got everything I need. Sit yourself done and let me get you something to eat. We can talk through this foolishness, ok?” she pulled her son’s arm gently to follow her into

the kitchen. She would not let him alone this time for she feared he might leave her. They both stood in the kitchen as she rummaged around to put a plate in the oven.

“I hate those microwaves. Makes the food taste like plastic,” Martha said to her son standing still like a statue

“I don’t need to eat. Or drink anything the way they put me together.”

“What?”

“I never get hungry or thirsty for days. Even weeks. Things will be complete within a few weeks. Thank you for not going on Oprah”

An aluminum pan was held in her hand. She looked up and finally realized that the boy she sent to school that morning was no longer the same. An owl out made a terrible howl. The pan slipped from her feeble hand down on the linoleum floor.

“What did they do to you?”

“Yes. When I walked to school that morning some men came in a car and asked me if I was James Gardner. They came from Howard University and wanted to see if I would join them in their campaign to make Darlington a safe place for black folks in the future. After Leonard was murdered, I knew this was what I was supposed to do all along.”

“That fool should have known better than trying to get the sheriffs arrested. He should have let the past stay buried. How silly it was to go around looking for folks they buried in the ground. Passing out pamphlets and telling folks to be pro-active. How he made so many white folks angry. Leonard should of stayed up North rather than coming here telling folks to ‘get up and stand up’.”

“Let me turn on the light and get a better look at you.”

When the room was filled with light, she saw her son who left her in clean sneakers and jeans and a button down shirt. He wore boots and army fatigues like he was going into a war.

“Where did you get these clothes from?”

“The Brotherhood mom. Look at what they did for me.” He detached his hand from its wrist and placed it in the sink. It moved the fingers first making a fist, then crawled up the edge of the sink by itself, and rested there, fingers neatly folded into the palm.

“Put it back on. How the hell you learned to do that?” James picked up his mechanical hand and plugged it into his wrist; just the way a child reattaches the arm on a plastic doll.

“What was wrong with your hand before?”

“Nothing. They just gave me a pair that was stronger. Nobody ever going to lynch another black Man in Darlington while I am around. Hear me!”

A sharp pain of arthritis went through his Martha’s leg. She kneeled over in pain.

“What’s wrong, Ma?”

“No no. It’s just this stress I been under.”

“If you come with me they can fix you up where you never feel pain again.”

“No! If the Lord didn’t fix me in a certain way, I don’t want to change. I was born fine the way I was.”

He placed his hand around his Mother's waist and guided her to a space on the sofa.

"My hands and body have been aching. Sometimes I think it has to do with your coming and going."

"The Brotherhood can make it where you can live longer than most people, like me. All that time I been gone ain't lost. Once they open your head up and put in a computer chip, we can still enjoy the time together like I never left. I learned a lot too, that I never would have if I stayed here."

He began to sing:

O del mio dolce ardor braMato oggetto!
L'aura che tu sepiri alfin respire.
Le tue vaghe sembianze. Amore in me dipinge.
Il mio pensier si finge

"Where in the world did you learn to sing like that James?" Tears glistened in her pupils.

"It's Italian mom. It's from a Puccini Opera, *La Boheme*. I can speak Spanish, French, Swahili and Japanese too. All due to this chip they put in my head. Remember when you saw me with those stitches? That's how they did it. The best universities in America couldn't do what Brotherhood did for me. I am a whole person now. I am a lot better than if I stayed in Darlington. See" He picked up the sofa his mother was sitting on with one hand smiling at how easy he was easy he was able to do it.

"Set this sofa down boy before you hurt yourself." He placed the sofa back down softly on the floor.

“When are they going to be done with you?”

“I have to stay for a little while more and then they will be done with me completely. I have another injection I must take.”

He lifted up his shirt and to show an outlet where a plug could be inserted.

“I can’t believe what I am seeing.” Martha felt death waiting outside her house waiting to break in and take her at any moment.

“No...No...No!” She screamed.

There was a hard knock on the door: “Martha! You ok in there?” A voiced asked outside her door.

“Who is that?” James whispered. “Did you tell anyone I was here?”

“No! Enough people think I gone crazy thinking you still alive and came back to see me. It’s Charlie. They helped looked for you when you didn’t come home from school that day. They thought I was going crazy saying how I saw you come home. They check on me to see if I am ok. Why don’t you come out and say hello to them. They see I wasn’t any fool. You could thank them from trying to help find you for all these years you were gone”

“No. Not yet.”

“Then go in there,” she pointed to a closet. Wait till I finish talking. It won’t sound good if I don’t talk with him for a little.”

He went to the closet and closed the door behind him. Martha fixed her hair in the mirror, tucking in the gray strands with a bobby pin. She tied on an apron over her clothes, and answered the door.

“You alright. I thought I saw something run on your rooftop earlier. Everything good in here?” Martha stepped away and opened the door wide so he could see she was fine.

“Yeah it is. What are you doing up so late?” Charlie scratching his head asked.

“Oh. You know me. Just getting ready for Sunday. I was never one to sleep through a rainstorm.” A lightning bolt cracked in the air.

“You better get home before it gets too bad,” Martha said.

“Alrighty. You mind if I could get a piece of that peach cobbler before I go?”

“I just finished the last piece yesterday, Charlie. But I have some more by tomorrow for sure,” she said grinning.

“Thank you kindly. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” And when she shut the door the closet swung opened.

“I remember him well. Man hasn’t he grown old. Nice of him to check on you. He still wears overalls and a blue cap. Nothing changes in Darlington huh?”

“How did you know what he was wearing if the door was shut?”

“I can see through anything.” His eyes twitched back and forth making robotic sounds inside of his eye sockets.

“I will come back to get you in case you want the Brotherhood to fix you up still.”

“Let me leave the world the way I come in James. I don’t know whatever got in you. Besides what can an old fart like me do for ...the Brotherhood.”

“I come from a family of proud men. That is why I did this to myself, so I can avenge my family like Hamlet.”

“Hamlet? Who that is? Tell me where he is at and I get my shotgun and blow him to kingdom come. I had no idea you held so much anger in you?”

“It is impossible to grow up soft and tender in a place where you are surrounded by danger, Mom. I want all of Darlington to remember what happened before...look at the trees in the forest; can't you see the gloom in the forest that still lingers on the braches when they are blossoming before spring comes? Can't you see the pain on folks who lived before? No! We must not be silent anymore. Let those who swung on branches have their day in Darlington. It isn't right to let people get away with cold murder.”

“What in Lord's name have they done to your mind James my boy?” She fell down on her sofa, thinking of how much he changed when the last time he walked through that door to school.

“I am nobody's boy. I am a man of the Brotherhood mom.”

She stared in the dark, hoping that what she heard would change. She wanted him to come home and act like things were before, but he wouldn't.

“Nothing was ever done to the Peckerwoods who lynched our folks in the forest.”

“James—there is nothing anything anyone can do to change the past. Let it go!”

“And we are supposed to go on like nothing ever happened.”

On the wall, was a picture of his late grandfather. He stared at it. An old black and white photograph of him in a suit.

“What are you planning on doing? Things have changed here in Darlington. There is a black Mayor and just two years ago—“

“That token nigga’ was put there to stop folks from complaining, Mom. Can’t you see? Folks walk around here like they about to explode with anger. People can’t walk around like nothing ever happened. I can’t. I never could. I tried for a while. But I just couldn’t.”

“I have no idea what you are planning on doing, but it doesn’t sound good. Those men you angry with are most likely six feet under. There is no one to make folks pay for what others done, James. Let it go”

“They have families still living. They’re the ones who will pay for the sin of their fathers.”

“You need to sit and pray and asked the Lord to take this anger out of you, baby.” His mother went and tried to get him to kneel down on his knees to pray, but he pushed her hands gently away.

“Stubborn. Just like your Daddy and Granddaddy. I couldn’t tell any of you anything when they were living.

“And you just thought we should all sit home and wait till the Lord found time to get off his chariot to come save the black folks of Darlington? Well he didn’t come! But he sent the Brotherhood instead Mom.”

“Hush your mouth. Show some respect in this house James. I don’t know what else the Brotherhood put inside your head, but it wasn’t respect or common sense.”

“If granddaddy were alive now he would know what I was doing was good. Isn’t that right granddaddy,” he said staring at the black and white photograph hanging off the wall in the living room.

“They know what I am doing is right? Don’t you granddaddy. You do the same thing if you were here now” he said, tracing his thick long fingers along the photograph.

“Don’t worry. I will do what you can’t. I will do what the folks in Darlington are too scared to do!” James said to the gray picture that hung besides the picture of Jesus. He tore it down, crushing the images of Jesus his blue eyes and blond hair crushed in his mechanical hand.

“I am going to even he score a bit. After the tonight, the dead will be able to sleep in peace.

“Please don’t go out there and hurt nobody. It isn’t fair to blame folks for things they know nothing about. Please don’t harm anybody. This town has seen enough blood spilled.”

In her last attempt to bring her son back, she threw both her arms around him, but it was like hugging a statue. She hoped he remembered the warm hugs she gave him from school, but her son stood there cold.

“I got to go, Mom.”

She felt the motors of an engine run through his body where there once was a heart pumping. She refused to let him go and threw both her arms around his shoulders, praying he stay home; to warm him into the person he once was before. He gently unpeeled her arms and placed them into the pockets of her apron.

“Can you stay at least until it stops raining outside? You might catch a cold out there running around.”

“Mom. Like I said.” Pause “The Brotherhood has made me where I can’t get sick from anything. Goodbye.” He walked upstairs and opened the window that was on the second floor. And in a single bound he leaped and disappeared with the wind outside. She watched her son jump from the top of a tree then disappeared into the thick gray clouds raining over Darlington.

What did they do to my boy? Was the last thought she had before closing her door.

Obituary

Robert D Lynch dead at 86.

Mr. Lynch was found burnt to death in his home with three of his grandchildren. The fire began in the late evening and firefighters had to evacuate residents from the entire community. Smoke still rises from where the house was torched.

Mr. Lynch was a controversial figure in the North Darlington. His father, a former Klansman, had his statue torn down after the people in the community learned more about his identity. During the Civil Rights era, Robert D Lynch was considered a lead suspect in the disappearance of several civil rights activists.

Mr. Lynch was the eldest and last surviving member of family that help founded Darlington County. He served as a councilman in the late fifties and became the town’s mayor for thirty years afterwards. After losing the election and the discovery that his family had ties with the Klan, every street, office building, park and road signs bearing the family’s name were torn down.

Recently, legal litigation was brought forth, with him possibly having to do with the disappearance of Jeffries. He will be missed by some of the older residents of the community, for how his family helped industrialize Darlington. But many feel his death will help put to rest a brutal past.

Darren, age 5, Karen 15 and Phillip 17 were killed in the fire. All three children were visiting while their parents went looking to buy homes in areas outside of Darlington. An autopsy discovered the man had a broken neck, but they assumed it was from running down the stairs where he lost balance and fell during the blaze. All three children were found in different rooms of the house.

“He was so frustrated that the work his family put in this town was being taken away,” said a neighbor whose house was also burnt down due to the blaze.

“He was nice and loved to have his grandchildren over.”

Mr. Lynch was rarely seen outside his house in the past three years, due to the investigation. Avoiding the scrutiny and radical of the community, his three grandchildren who lived in Darlington began to have problems in school also.

“When girls saw Karen walk in the hall, they spit on her hair,” a fellow classmate recalled.

One time when Phillip went to his locker, there was this long bloody rope inside it. A group of black students even dressed themselves up in Klan’s outfits and went trick or treating at his house.”

A memorial is being held this Sunday for all four family members. People are ambivalent about attending, for they feel they may be associated and called a racist due to his ambiguous past.

“He was always kind and friendly to me,” said Loretta Watson, a maid who worked for Robert Lynch.

“Gave me money when the bank tried to foreclose on my home. He drove me to store when my car broke down. He even helped my son with his education.”

There are many questions that seemed to go unanswered in the wake of his death, where the past had divided a community seeking to move forward to a new and better future.

SUITE SIX: A BOOK OF POETRY

By Jeremy Brown

Acknowledgment

I am indebted to the Schomburg library in Harlem for helping me gather information on the life of Jeremy Brown. The Schomburg has opened its doors to me and led me to meet individuals who once knew Jeremy Brown well. Here was a research library he frequented and also the place where I sit and type this acknowledgement. I would like to thank the grant from the McForster Foundation and the Jacobs Foundation for their financial support in completing this project. If it wasn't for the funding and support of both groups, this work would never have taken flight. It is due to the resources of this library where Jeremy Brown had unlimited access to meet every writer that ever walked on the streets of Harlem. I have been petitioned to include his poetry in Schomburg private archives. Sitting here as I do now, I feel closer to Jeremy Brown than when I did when he was living. Even in the few poems (nineteen) I have found they have moved me enough to get them published, although many seemed to be in the middle of being revised. Having his poetry housed together at the Schomburg, I know, would be one of the biggest accomplishments he has made in his short life in Harlem. He would feel privileged knowing his poetry is being honored this evening with other greats who have graced the streets of Harlem in their day: Hughes, Cullen, etc. As his spirits fly over Harlem, he thanks all of you as I just did. Finally, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the English Department at City College where Jeremy attended and graduated college.

Last, but not least, I like to thank Professor Cristina Wright who has shared wonderful stories about Jeremy to me; what made him smile, laugh, cry and get angry.

Chronology of Jeremy Brown 1980-2011

1980-Born on Convent Avenue to Susie (English school teacher) and Cisco Brown (activist/writer for the Amsterdam News).

1997-Enrolls as an English major at City College

2001-Graduates Summa Cum Laude and goes on to the MFA program at Columbia University.

2003-Graduated with a degree in Creative Writing. Gets involved with various anti-gentrification groups in Harlem.

2004-Receives a grant based on his essays on the disappearance of Harlem. His article, "The New Renaissance Harlem" is published in the New Yorker.

2006-Buys and moves into a brownstone on Convent Avenue, which he calls the Niggretti Manor where he invites various artists to come to his home to discuss various politics that is presiding over Harlem. Joined rallies and other groups protesting the closing of stores and other venues in Harlem.

2008-Jeremy is arrested thirteen times for preventing marshals from evicting tenants from their homes in Harlem. He starts a radio show in Harlem at CCNY alerting people of what they can do to save their homes and property in Harlem.

2011- After losing his house keys at a party, Jeremy Brown is killed sneaking into his own home by two police officers who assume he is a burglar. President Obama, Clinton, and news media around the world attend his vigil.

Preface

The nineteen poems I compiled here represent the body of work that I have been able to salvage from Brown's attic. The poems range in theme structure and style. He recited tons of poetry in cafes and bars in Harlem. I have found other poems written by Jeremy, but the ones presented here show his strength as a poet and his attitude about Harlem and its rapid metamorphosis.

As Harlem began to be bought and resold during the late nineties, these poems show a man angry at the lack of control he had in his own backyard. He felt his community was being ripped from his fingers and his poetry became a way to deal with this change, where Brown documented things metaphorically, illuminating the events that went beyond the surface; he showed the things people in Harlem weren't able to notice or were simple ignored. But he didn't.

His Mother and Father in their grief discovered these poems and called me to see if I could make them known to the public. At the time that I write this, I was considered myself an esteemed literary scholar in the community, especially after graduating from Columbia University. His parents felt that placing these poetic letters in my possession would reach a wider audience beyond the walls of 125 Street.

There is a recurring theme of gentrification running through the poems about Harlem. In the table of contents, I tried to place them in a specific order to the year that was written to show growth that was transpiring in him as a poet. I felt was some poems were straight forward and easy to grasp, while others weren't. Most seemed to contain a magical, fantastic element in them. His usage of these tropes permits him to discuss his

community in a way realistic literature isn't able to, by going just not beneath the surface, but revealing and opening us up to all possibilities.

At times, I found the poems to be playful and others they made left me quiet and contemplative. Each one has stirred a different emotion in me and even has brought out ones I was unprepared to feel. After reading this brief work, I feel like I have been through an array of emotions in such a week: happiness, joy, anger, sadness

In his first poem, he makes a tribute to one of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. The ellipse he uses resembles the story *Smoke, Lilies and Fields*, yet he puts the writer, Richard Bruce Nugent into the story, showing his last days before leaving Harlem:

He wanted to do something...to write or draw...or something...but it was so comfortable just to lay there on the bed...his shoes off...and think...think of everything...short disconnected thoughts...to wonder...to remember...to think and smoke...why wasn't he worried that he had no money...he had had five cents...but he had been hungry...he was hungry and still...all he wanted to do was...lay there comfortably smoking...think...wishing he were writing...or drawing...or something...

In Brown's poetry, he revisits this story by making Nugent the subject of his poem using the same form as Nugent's short story. Brown returns to the people who have walked here in Harlem before, celebrating the early people of the cannon. Nugent becomes the subject of Brown's poem and by incorporating his form of writing pays homage to a figure that has long been forgotten.

In *Middle School in Harlem*, Brown discusses his ex-girlfriend's experience working as a substitute in Harlem. The poem is better understood looking at it, more than it is by just reading it aloud. The concrete form, the jumping and chaos and the

disconnection of words demonstrates the pandemonium our children are forced to experience as they try to learn. The poem demonstrates the problems, not only our educators have trying to get kids to learn, but also the fact that the time they play in class has made them lose valuable time in their education,

Behind these poems there exists a story. Some of these poems have grown from his experience growing up in Harlem, while others are a foreshadowing of what Harlem might be in the future, such as in *Bells Rising Over the Apollo*:

Some still see smoke rise over the ruins of the Apollo. A giant mushroom cloud rising in the space where performer once sung

Brown felt Harlem what it offered would not be cherished by our young children today. Without the people in the community, he didn't see how it was possible to stay open.

As you can see, these poems represent his fear, but also was a signs of Brown's consciousness. A neighborhood being swept away from the people who invested in it, such as in the poem *Collection on Sugar Hill*:

*And the wheels screeched down Convent Avenue
A man called Mr. Charlie stepped out a car where its window were tinted and began
collecting things he saw on the road. He took the vendors first who sold t-shirts on tables
and carried them away. Then he gathered the caramel children on Lenox Avenue, one
who wore an Afro with sequins, gloves and white socks.*

I resist doing any revision or editing to the pieces for I wanted to be as true to the work as the poet was in composing each one of them. What I felt after reading these poems was his devotion he had to his community. I hope those who read it will see Harlem as he has in these ten pages he left behind him in his remembrance.

Jeremy named referred to some of these poems as the “New Renaissance,” which I have given as the title of this book. As I pause, every so often and look outside my condo’s window on Lenox Avenue, I wait to see if the things I have read pass by on the street. I am waiting to see if a poem Jeremy Brown has written will somehow materialize before me on my street corner. And how I wish it would.

After reading these poems, I hope they will stir you in some way, and awake those who have long been asleep. And feel the power Jeremy Brown was once able to manipulate with his pen.

Remembrance

We were both students at Columbia University MFA program. He entered class wearing a blazer and horn rim glasses and sat to the only seat that empty in class beside me. Underneath his left arm pit was a book of poetry by none other than Langston Hughes. He took me to the bars and we spoke until the late hours of the evening about the things he wanted to do for his community. I remember in class, there was a young lady who said that black literature was sociological more than it was literary. Jeremy replied in a way I would never forget till this very day—the problem with black literature isn't that it is sociological, rather that the writer is always preoccupied with translating his work so the “other” can decipher what it is saying to its reader. We became instant friends from that day forward. I have learned much from this man living as I have done in his passing.

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SMOKE, LILIES AND JADE: RICHARD BRUCE NUGENT

He wanted to do something...to write or draw...or cruise...but he had to wait for the truck to come. In the wind that shook lamppost and windows in tenement buildings... the night came it made him look like a lost shadow on the corner...fading him into the night...he watches a young man strut alone home vivid and colorful... the night had sucked all color from him...his boxes were left on the sidewalk... sketches of men popped out and scattered in the wind out of untaped lids ...unpublished poems, unrevised manuscripts blazed on the street ...smoke rising from the black printed letters...sketches of "friends" he drew came running down the avenue naked ... he wanted to chase after the drawings...to bury them...to hide them away in his treasure chest ...but his feet were frail and creaked....unframed photographs with Langston Hughes ...smiling at the Cotton Club...lay soaked in the gutter... his teeth... turned yellow ...he rocked back and forth waiting... listening to a mellow sad croon bustling from a truck's radio ... Hoboken, New Jersey was written on it...it stopped to take him to his new apartment... he turned and waved goodbye to Harlem.

THE WALL

There was a gray wall on an avenue
Called “De-Renaissance” in Harlem.
Made of Uncut rock—stretched up and faded
Into the ashen-tone clouds that hung above
The mortared rocks were poorly stacked.

Observe the hideous misspelled words that spray painted on its
surface: **GO THE FUK BAK HRE U CAME FRM!**

Another sign that hung on the dreary concrete: **No More Trespassing!**

It was an old wall and people who first built it hoped it would stay up forever. Well, until Mr. Gentry left Harlem.

Mr. Gentry was a pale face stranger who always wore a crisp white shirt, tie and black shoes that shined. He strolled down the avenues of Harlem asking the boys and girls playing on the corner about the neighborhood. He had taken pictures of dilapidated stores; boarded brownstones that he hoped would belong to him by Friday.

And one day it changed and the people on the corner of “De-Renaissance” Avenue had no idea what hit them...

A wind came and took its fist and slammed knuckles into the gray stone surface. The wall crumbled leaving heaps of gray pebbles on the ground.

Mr. Gentry cleaned his horn rimmed glasses with a handkerchief. He walked in to see what other treasures he could own by Friday.

THE HARLEM SUITE: A POEM IN THREE BEATS

Suite 1

A red –brick tower on 409 Edgecombe Avenue was once home to a boy with musical talents. And the room where he played syncopated rhythms, music which danced along the street outside his window. The sun would always come and dance its yellow feet across his wall on the picture of a bird held in a cage by an old monk boarding a train to New York.

Suite 2

AT 555 Edgecombe Avenue there was a school that gave him music lessons. But when condos sprouted up around Harlem like weeds in a garden, everyone forgot there was a school on the corner. Now, a world famous musician, he was asked to come home to help keep the doors of his old school open. But, he was in concert halls in Europe and too busy to return.

Suite 3

On the day the brick was tossed into the dumpster, shipped to a graveyard of rubbish the trumpeter walked across a stage in London:

Beep, hum, boom. Lad obo. Hoaebf. Xgeilf. Be do wo. She Low dat. I jst foegt. Doentak.

Tote that hlem I whr I bon. I fogt aout whe I cae fom. Beep. Do-wop woo. Cat pla a tue.

BELLS RINGING OVER THE APOLLO

At twilight,

Smoke rises over the ruins of the Apollo in Harlem, a giant mushroom of cloud still in the space where performers once sung.

Souls of the dead come when the bell chimes. An old man wearing a soiled trench coat shakes a bell on the corner.

“Here is where the souls of the Apollo come, my son.” I pushed my father in his wheel chair as he told me of Smokey Robinson, Thelonius Monk, James Brown, Michael Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, and Jackie Wilson.

“What are they doing now?” I ask father.

“They are entering the theatre.”

COLLECTION ON SUGAR HILL (HARLEM)

One afternoon, a gray tart truck came rolling down a corner in Harlem on Lenox.

It left long trails of smoke.

And the wheels screeched down Convent Avenue

A man called Mr. Charlie stepped out a car where its window were
tinted and began collecting things he saw on the road.

He took the vendors first who sold t-shirts on tables and carried them
away. Then he gathered the caramel children on Lenox Avenue, one who wore an Afro
with sequins, gloves and white socks,

And the men who wore bow ties and sold bean pies on Malcolm X
Boulevard, shouting the praises of Muhammad were carried off with them too...

When the truck drove away

And driver, Mr. Stevens, took a sip of the coffee, which he sprinkled with brown
sugar, it tasted like it had lost all flavor as he rolled away into the sunset.

A MIDDLE SCHOOL IN HARLEM

Jack was one who enjoyed mischief a lot in school.

Our teacher, Ms Jill, taught biology Monday's.
She was a mean old nasty lady. She put work on the blackboard and never explained it.

She had a big mean wart; it hung at the tip of her nose.
The clothes she wore were black and her eyes were hard as stones.

Great big brown boxes sat in the back of her class room hoarding things that were old and outdated.

Jack went missing.

Everyone searched for Jack

C
k; they pulled over boulders in the park; the principle and deans of our middle school looked in the school's basement; it was a place where children were sometimes started "biology", homework before coming home.

But Jack wasn't there.

At 11:45 Ms. Jill yelled at the top of her lungs when she went into her big brown box to get a *heart*.

Instead, Jack

A
C
K popped out and said surprise! Ms. Jill heels clicked down the halls—a red heart in her claws. (And the school bell rang for lunch at 12:00).

J
A
C
I can't remember seeing anything funnier than seeing Ms. Jill find Jack pop out of a box.

CHILDREN OF THE ECLIPSE

The constellation hung over the city stars danced against a black wall winking down at Harlem the moon waited for its chance to eat the sun a cold gray stone the moon turned to a burnt orange hanging in the air

Children of Harlem came out and stand in the moon's shadow the yellow flame that lit heaven sky was covered by a gray floating wall

The children of Harlem stretched their brown black and tan hands up at the moon's shadow letting it glisten on their faces a big dipper dropped a shovel of dust over the children then the stone rolled away

The eclipse left behind bright smiles pleasant dreams and images of crescent moons in pupils

One child claimed he was able to speak to the moon it told him he would be a feared and respected man in Harlem chasing people them from their apartments he knocked hard on their door show a letter then away they went to sleep on someone's sofa

The second child touched by the eclipse claimed he could see things happen in the future he saw smoke rise up from his home in the housing projects making the angels in the clouds scream in terror a great big condo would grow on its spot but the doors were shut and bolted when he tried to enter

A third child had great crescent eyes his short afro had turned silver people came bearing flowers at his door step they prayed on their knees before him like he was a great omen

PETER STUYVESANT AVENUE

I

Windows were covered in tin foil. Brick walls had missing teeth. Weeds grew wild on the roof. The building frowned on anyone who walked passed it.

II

I walked alone through the places I played as a child where windows were covered in brick and stumbled upon a new street --Peter Stuyvesant Avenue.

I heard trumpets playing above on the roof of my old home on Lenox. Angels with wooly hair cried in a gray cloud that followed me.

White lightning flashed in a bale of cotton

III

Wrinkled orange and crinkled yellow leaves fell on my head and shoulders, while reaching for the last red apple in the park. The long thick branches fought with me, its brown limbs scrapping against my hands and shoulders.

A cloud lifted and moved to someone else in the city. Doves dashed from it and flapped their wings, from the gray smoke.

And the sun came smiling over Harlem. I could hear music blowing from the building that looked like a dumpster on the corner.

I walked past my old home and saw a condo; it was tall, sleek and gold.

ONCE AGO

I

When I returned, I walked alone through the places we once visited.
On Lenox Avenue, a cloud followed me reminding me of the gloom I felt.

From a window in an upstairs apartment, I heard Billie Holiday singing the blues,
Her sorrow and anguish
As I searched for our old turf.

II

In Marcus Garvey Park
A gray condo touching the clouds sits across the park.
I can remember when music drummed through here before it was built.

For a moment I heard trumpets playing and I thought I saw Angels with wooly hair
singing.
I can recall us sitting and watching leaves fall in autumn.

III

Before I returned home, I went looking for another place we frequented.
But it has vanished, replaced by another condo.
Walking to the train, I passed the Adam Clayton Powell building where
We stood and chatted. I was happy it was still here
It was that moment standing on our favorite corner, the clouds lifted. Doves flapped their
wings over Harlem.
And the sun came smiling over the city.

HEART OF DARKNESS

She boarded a boat with a red, black and green flag on its deck
Waves splashed against its boards, filled with people going to Africa

Zora dragged a lifetime of belongings: a bible, her favorite blue dress and a journal
Stuffed in a suitcase
As the ship moved across the Atlantic Ocean to Africa
She observed the murky waters of the sea

Zora heard a cry underwater and a metal chain scrape in the ocean
As the ship reached the shores of West Africa,
She ran to see if the trees were filled with apples
And searched for temples made of gold...rather?

She saw huts where the wind had snatched off their roofs
And coal colored children waving a flag of fifty stars that was red, white and blue.

CAN YOU REMEMBER?

I

On Lenox Avenue, a cloud followed me reminding me of the gloom I felt.
From a window, I heard Billie Holiday singing.

A gray condo touched the clouds where we once sat in the park.
I can remember when music drummed here.

For a moment I heard trumpets playing in the sky my old friend.
Remember, how we sat watched leaves fall in autumn

III

Before I returned home, I went looking for another place we frequented.

But it has vanished, replaced by a condo.

A CITY REMEMBERS

Two towers crumble.
Dust falls
Like snow on streets.
People floating
On clouds gaze down
Where avenues
Are flooded with
Red blinking sirens.

PETER AND THE CHARIOT

Sitting on a rock facing green pastures
Peter and a friend wait for a horse drawn carriage
Stars twinkled like characters
On a stage. Falling down over earth as if this was a play.

Horses came galloping, bursting through clouds.
A driver steered the horses to the spot where both men waited
The ground where the stallions landed vibrated
Peter and the man looked at the driver then bowed.

"There is room for only one to come," the driver said.
A door opened to the chariot. Both men fought to go first.
The coachman stopped them.

"I will come back in an hour. Only one man will be allowed to come."
The red-eyed horse stuck its hooves into the air and disappeared.
"I should go for I have put others before me and always showed people love,"
Peter could not think of a reason he should go and shook with fear.

When the chariot came again through the air
Peter sat alone with blood on his shirt and fingertips.

CITIES ONCE HAD LANDMARKS

It's hard to imagine that earth
Was once beautiful. A park

Filled with flowers? A Skylark
Soaring over cities?
In the silent of the dark

I have no memory of ballparks
And mountains surrounded by clouds
Or cities that once had landmarks

Earth-this dust ball of smoke. A birthmark
Left and filled by the ocean. Washing away
Landmarks and statues of people. In the dark.

I draw pictures of skies filled with skylarks.
I imagine what they would look like:
The ballparks, mountains, cities with landmarks
In the silence of the dark.

THE DAY AFTER OSAMA BIN LADEN WAS ASSASSINATED

Floating in the salt scented-aquamarine sea,
A white sheet was caught on a wormed hook.
The old man reeled in his catch to his wooden
Vessel. His raft rocked on water, yanking it in.
The corpse had a hole in his eye,
Turban wrapped around his scalp
Seashells clung in a long gray beard.
He waited for night before sailing to shore.
But his boat toppled, the fisherman swallowed
By the waves of the ocean.

June 25, 2009

A couple brings home
A boy--a bundle
Their seventh child

To a one story house
That sits on a flowerless lawn
In Gary, Indiana

The baby came out
Kicking and singing
From his mother's womb.

Reciting ABC's
While other babies wailed
In the hospital's nursery.

In the forest when he was twelve
Under the oak trees
The boy walked

Wearing bright sparkling socks,
Tinted sunglasses. Singing
With robins who tweeted on branches

While flashlights searched for him in the dark
They found him dancing under the stars
His face drenched in sweat

They asked the boy why he was here alone:
"I saw a shadow running
Under the eye of the moon

On the moon, astronauts claimed
They saw a man walking
On the crust of the earth.

THE ECONOMY IS IMPROVING

One morning I dreamt I was in heaven.
A note was taped on my front door from the landlord: Ten days was printed in red colors.
Department stores opened without glass doors
On a sidewalk, I see a sofa, table and a box filled with clothes.

A note was taped on my front door from my landlord: Ten days was printed in red letters.
The Homeless rush to replace their tattered rags
To dress themselves like the people moving into condos.
On a sidewalk, I see a sofa, a table and a box filled with clothes

In ten days my bed, sofa and TV was under a cloud in Harlem
The sheriff galloped on a horse to say I must go
In three minutes or I will be shipped away
To a new home downtown

With metals bars for a front door
Food prepared for me without ever leaving my bed
Cold coffee and ham between two slices of white bread
And walls painted with artwork from the homeless

With a ceiling without a sky filled with stars.
A note was taped on my front door from the landlord: Ten days was printed in red colors.
Department stores open on sidewalks without front glass doors where
I awoke one morning and dreamt I was in heaven.

STILL I RISE

Out of ashes
A bird shaped
In gold flames

Perches on
A plain tree.
Lighting the

Forest
Like the sun
At noon.

That Beast; head
Shaped eagle.

Blinded by the blaze
My eyes
Dim—*remember?*

*The fowl built
A nest in
Gold straw.*

*Over the
Roof of
My jail cell!*

Out of ashes
I rise—a
Man made of
Bronze, frowning.

Captured
On film. The phoenix
Lays its

Claws on my
Shoulders, while
Covering me in feathered
Flakes. I'm famous
In February...

STRANGE FRUIT

Bones brittle like branches fallen off an oak.
Andrew awakes on his mattress with a scream
He hears bouncing against the trees in the forest
The gray-haired man shits, showers and shaves

Where the echoing is
Among trees that have weathered from past winters
Frost freezes the frightened and hungry robins
Under an umbrella of branches Andrew huddles

(I remember) A black man hung here—he wore a straw hat
And a pair of overalls. Long weeds brushed against the soles of his shoes.
(Blood dripped on our young porcelain faces.)
He cried like a canary while air dancing.

A black body barbequed in the morning sun.
(I remember) Blood covered boots leaving footprints on the staircase of our house
“Grandfather, you must never go out by yourself. Especially in your condition.”
“But I heard it—the mourning voice moving in my head, mocking me again.”

SUITE SEVEN: THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME

“Are we almost there yet?” Terrell asked jumping at the hoot of an owl. Terrell had packed a bag with a pair of underwear, a toothbrush, socks and a t-shirt. But he forgot the photo of his deceased mother. Dead leaves stuck on the soles of his sneakers; he stopped and peeled them away and let the wind snatch them into the breeze.

“Slim’s waiting for us. It won’t be too long.” His cousin born and raised in Darlington, South Carolina led the way into the forest. Cousins’ feet weren’t clothed in the latest fashion as his. Black hooded shirts, jeans they wore to blend in with evening’s shadows. Trees tops pointed into clouds where stars wanted to climb down and sit on them as if it was Christmas. A star gave off a bright light on the stage floor of green pastures, oak trees and white orchids.

“Who are we suppose to meet?” Terrell asked, while leaves fell from a chinaberry tree into his hooded sweatshirt.

“Slim Greer.”

“The fool who walks around town talking nonsense?”

“Just come on. He can tell us where the underground tunnel is.

Damien and Terrell rested beside a bed of fresh crocuses that pushed their purple bodies through the soil. Terrell tried to put together words to describe their smell: “the purple that has come and blessed me, how do I think of thee.” Terrell searched his knapsack to find the photo. There was the book of poetry by Jeremy Brown he found and scans the pages to see if his father’s photo was stuck between the pages.

“What is the matter?”

“Nothing. I think I forgot something or lost it on the way coming here,” he said in a sad voice. The moon rolled to its spot in the sky, where the constellation slowly began showing.

“You want to go back?”

“I will be alright.”

The moon waited behind a curtain of clouds before making its grand entrance. After an hour sitting underneath a maple tree, Damien got up, “It’s getting late. He isn’t coming. Let’s get home and try this again tomorrow.” A bear growled somewhere close. They both became silent. They listened how a drum played and cooled the growling of a bear into making sounds like a new born cub; it even tamed the rattle snakes that hid above them in the leaves off the maple tree. Before either boy saw Slim they heard a tap, tap, tap of the drum ringing in the air.

“Come. He is the one who can tell us where the underground tunnel is,” Damien said moving to the spot of where the drummer played. The beat grew louder; their feet dashing towards its music. And there he was, Slim Greer sitting on a rock.

“You are late Mr. Greer.” Damien said to him.

“How is this fool going to know where anything is?” Terrell said whispering in the ear of his cousin.

“Are you ready to see the underground tunnel,” Slim said. His salt and pepper hair had a crown made of fallen branches, with red carnations.

“Yes.” Damien pulled out ten dollars from his pocket.

“There are two of you.” And Terrell dug in his pocket of his jeans to take out another ten dollar bill. Slim got up walked away and when he was a short distance, said, “Are you two young men coming?”

The boys followed Slim Greer with his drum thrown over his thin shoulder. The tops of trees blanketed the stars. There were yellow daffodils standing in rows down untamed green pastures.

“I never been this far down here before,” he said to Slim trying to keep up with him. After a long distance of walking, Slim stopped them and stood at the mouth of a cave. Terrell became impatient “This is a cave. I thought we were going to the underground tunnel. Isn’t it supposed to be in the ground?” He asked Slim. Slim’s drum tied over his shoulder began a syncopated rhythm. He slithered away back into the forest behind foliage of bushes.

“Can this cave take me to Harlem?” Terrell called. But his voice was lost in the noise of the evening. The buzzing of bees, the flapping wings of butterflies, the snoring of bats that rested inverted on tree branches were audible.

“Well, you want to go in?” Damien said waiting for Terrell to step in first. Inside the cave there was a bellow that came reverberating against the walls. A yawn.

“What was that?” Terrell jumped back before he went any closer. Jagged stones shaped like cracked teeth hung at its opening.

“How can this be an underground tunnel? He took us to a cave. I knew better than to follow this fool.” Terrell picked up a rock lying in front of his foot. It came back out hitting the pitcher on the forehead.

“You ok? Damien asked, pulling him away in case something else vomited from the cave’s mouth. The boys looked at each other puzzled after they heard feet move. A man appeared, wearing a navy blue uniform. Medals hung loose on his jacket. He swung a saber in his hand cutting the air in the dark. He dropped it and pulled out a musket that was over his left shoulder. Seventy-two inches long, it had leather braided ties that secured the rifle from falling out. Stamped brass state medals went down the front of his jacket. His navy blue forage fell. High grade leather boots went to the man’s knee caps.

“Come out you scoundrel!” The officer said. Damien sneezed for the fragrances of lilies that he could not see tickled his nostrils.

“I heard you.” Terrell came out of hiding first holding his hands high in the air dropping his knapsack on the ground.

“Please don’t shoot,” Terrell said. The uniformed officer placed his musket back into its holder.

“Why what are you boys doing out here by yourself? If the confederate army found you two, do you know what would of happen?”

“We are just trying to get to the underground tunnel?”

“Put your hands down. What bring you to these parts?”

“We are looking to go north to Harlem.”

“North—to Harlem." Like it did for Harriet Tubman, sir.”

“Who?”

“You don’t know who she is?” Terrell laughed. “She led slaves to freedom to the South by going through an underground tunnel. We learned about it in school.”

“I’ve never been to any school. I worked since I was a young boy like you pulling cotton from the fields, carrying large heavy sacks across my back. Mister beat you real good if he saw a colored reading a book.”

“You got beat for reading?”

“No. Because no one I knew could read. No... wait a minute... there was one who did. My Mister sold one of the slaves’ twin daughters to teach him a lesson. I can’t recall the fellow no more. Horrible to see the way a child is taken away from their family. My Mister sold an aunt of mine too. But it wasn’t for reading a book. How I wish I know where she was so we all could be a family once more.” The boys turned to each other puzzled

“What you two fellows planning on doing now? Do you want to join the army to help free our people?”

“Mister?” Terrell staring at the officer’s out of style clothing said “How long you been asleep in that cave?”

“Not too long. I think. I need to find where the others battalion went so we can kill us some confederate soldiers.” He pointed to a gold colored medal on his jacket. “If I kill a few more, I can become a lieutenant.”

“Mister...how many people you killed?”

“Stop calling me Mister. My name is General Johnson,” he indicated the faded image of an eagle on his medallion. He dusted himself and looked at a phoenix that sat on the bough above them.

“I need to see if the confederates are coming.”

“There isn’t any war anymore. Did you even know that there is a black president in America again?” The soldier let out a laugh.

“You boys need to stop fooling around. You were sleeping under a rock. We are in a war. Just go sit in the cave and be quiet. I be back later after I find some more soldiers,” and off he went disappearing just like Slim Greer did into the woods.

“Well, what do we do now?” Damien asked Terrell.

“Let’s go inside the cave and see where it might lead us.” Before entering Damien stopped and thought of home.

“What is the matter?”

“I want to go home. I wished I never walked out here so late at night. I know I am probably worrying my folks like crazy. I know I get a spanking, but I know I deserve it for fooling with you”

“A spanking? What is that?”

“You have one when you done something you shouldn’t?”

“No. My Mother used to say it was an old relic of slavery handed to black people. Never tolerate it in the house. I get time-outs.”

“A what?”

“It’s called a time out fool. When you go to your room and sit down in your room.”

“I got some of those,” Damien said, “but not all the time” rubbing his behind remembering.

“Well, parents can’t beat their children anymore. Its child abuse and they can get three to five years for it. Even more.”

“That ain’t going to stop my Daddy. Besides, how am going to be able call somebody for help? He will get to the front door before I could.” As the boys debated, there was another yawn in the cave’s dwelling.

“Who do you think that is? More Soldiers,” Damien asked standing behind his cousin.

“I never walked this far into this forest before. How am I supposed to know?” Damien replied. They hid further away from the crocuses and went to a tree a couple of yards away. A man, in his thirties, appeared in a tattered shirt. His pants were held up by a rope. On bare feet, he paced back and forth on the soil. The Caveman sat on a rock not far from the cave’s entrance and wept like a baby.

“They done left me.” And he sobbed making a poisonous snake feel compassion slithered into the woods for another prey. His weeping began making the other animals in the woods cry with him. A bear moaned, as did the crows flying in the air. And the sky cried making puddles on the soil, long stem daffodils in the green pastures bended; the wind tossed snatched and tossed apples and other black berries into the air. The moss was a wet carpet. The boys were becoming soaked beneath the tree’s leaves hoping act it an

umbrella. Their jeans, hooded sweatshirt and Terrell's sneakers were wet. The caveman wept so loudly, it chased away any fear the boys had of approaching another stranger. His sobs made him appear unlikely of hurting anyone, but in need of compassion, love.

"Mister. Come in the cave," the boys ran through puddles of water. He sat on the rock weeping and wouldn't enter.

"Come inside before you get sick," Damien called to him. His tattered rags began to cling to coal colored skin.

"For what? They gone and left me." The rain kept falling as the man cried as if someone was hurting him.

"What's wrong, Mister?"

"They left me here and went on North. I wanted to sleep a little bit longer and they left me to go on North." Welts, like lumps of clay, were on his back.

"Come in," Damien called again, while his cousin took off his sneakers to dry. The Caveman came with slouched shoulders, moving like a snail in mud.

"Who did that to you?" asked Terrell pointing to thick scars that ran down the man's back

"It happened back at home. My mister did it when I called myself trying to run off north before. Did it whenever I could. Made me wear a bell around my head so he knew when I was coming and going. After my wife died, I had no reason to stay on the plantation. Took everything that a man could have. I didn't want to leave because I still had folks there who didn't want to come north. Serves me right when I think on it. I kept complaining I had a family I should had never left behind me. I bet Mister Charlie got a

hold of her. That was his name, John Burrows Charles. He owned us, so there was nothing for me to stay for.” And when he spoke of him, Damien stepped away, afraid. Terrell shivered.

“He come and send a fellow to bring our wives to his bed, when his wife was gone travelling.”

“I know I should have stayed with the family I had left. My wife died when she went to his bedroom one evening.”

“What do you mean?” Damien asked.

“What do you think he means dummy?” Terrell stopped cleaning his shoe to listen.

“I swore if ever I got the chance, I kill him and rescue what family I had left there.

“If I ever became free.” Damien thought how he was running from home, how he complained of doing chores and the spankings he got when he got all D’s from school. Out of all the lashing he got, his parents never tried to make his back look like that.

“Mister—we have been freed since Lincoln created the Emancipation Proclamation.”

“The what?”

In Eighteen Sixty-Three. That was when slavery ended. Well it did in most places anyway.”

“So, I am free, like the bird on that tree,” and a long tail swallow spread it wings, flapping it with joy.”

“I can go do what I please.”

How could this man not know that? Terrell thought. He was asleep all this time missing what the world offered. Sleeping as the world spun for centuries on its axis. He missed so much in that case to a world that had so much to give him. It reminded Terrell of the black folks who lived in Darlington who walked without a sense of purpose, urgency or the folks living in NY who were chained to their desk at work complaining of the long hours they worked.

“Yeah.”

The caveman ran out running up and down the pastures, jumping like a man freed from prison. And the rain became a drizzle.

Damien asked, “What are you going to do now?”

“I am going to look for my family to tell them the news.”

“They long dead, Mister. Do you know what year this is,” but his exhilaration would not be broken. The Caveman could hear nothing for he was running around pastures.

“If I am around why can’t be too?” He hugged his young messenger and flew out the cave into the night like a bat, dashing don the pastures, singing, “freedom. I am now free.”

He jumped on the bough where the swallow rested and flapped his arms like they were wings. The swallow, with its long tail flew and he followed. “I can’t wait to see my family,” and a call came from the swallow flying up, up and above.

"I always wish one day he lord come and but wing on back. I come take my family no matter where they were," with his arm held high in the air, his shirt falling to floor, he revealed more scars.

My daddy never beat me that bad. Damien thought. Damien and Terrell watched as swallow opened its beak opening its mouth as it could talk, "awk, awk," the swallow called. And from everywhere swallows came flying high into the air going far into the depth of the forest, the unknown.

"It must know where they are," the Caveman said. The swallow perched so high on its branch. And he followed, "I wished I could jump on its back and fly so I could see where my family is." He ran trying to keep up with the long tail of the birds as they flocked in the air.

The boys watched dumbfounded.

"Wait wait for me," he yelled picking up his tattered soaked shirt to follow.

"You two can go on in and wait for me if you want. Oh, how I wished this day would come." He started to sing and his song faded as did the black hood they gave him as he ran to catch up with his guide soaring in the air. Big globes of mud fell from the soles of his feet. He left muddy footprints along the green pasture.

"Mister, mister. They won't be there," Damien mournfully called, but his words feel on mute ears for the Caveman listed only to the birds. A flutter of calls came from their beaks while they nip away at the fireflies swarming above the green fields.

The long tails left trails of smoke in the air. The swallows flapped their long wings in the air waiting it seemed for him to come along.

And the boys walked home holding hands as they made their journey back to what they both felt was now their castle compared to the cave both the general and the caveman lived in.

