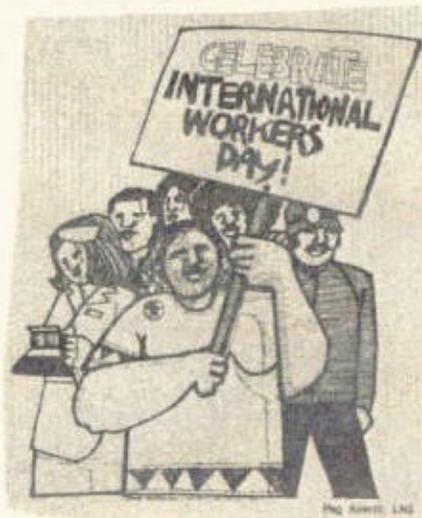


Struggle

A Magazine of Proletarian Revolutionary Literature



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Front Cover: *Egyptian women demonstrate against violent repression of women;
Obama reveals self as Bush II (see pp. 70-72)*

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accordingly.*



Editorial:

Great day in the morning! Class warfare brought into the open by the Occupy movement!

What a difference a few months makes! This is always true in the class struggle. You can go for years fighting almost the same battles, with little give on either side, then something changes, some shift in mood and sense of strength among the working masses, some outrage by the ruling classes, and an open struggle breaks out. The masses start to come into action. Their strength and creativity begin to be displayed. Everything changes. No, the class forces, the class structure have not fundamentally changed. But the mood, the conversation, as it is now called, changes. Suddenly the battle between the classes, which goes on constantly but mostly behind the scenes, either underground or without bold answer by the downtrodden, bursts into the open. Daring fighters for the workers, for the poor, step forward. The ruling class is momentarily on its heels, astounded that what it considered to be the mute, accepting mass is now denouncing it, pounding on its doors, daring to risk life and limb to fight. "All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born!" So wrote Yeats after the Irish uprising of 1913. And so can we today.

I am speaking of course of the Occupy movement. It may have illusions that the whole 99% is opposed to the ruling class. It may dream that the union leaders are friends to the fight of the workers. Much will depend on whether a section of the Occupiers begins to link up and build organization with the rank-and-file workers against management and the union misleaders. Many occupiers may have illusions that the police are truly their friends, Occupy may hope that certain organizational methods like consensus decisions and leaderlessness will protect it from being co-opted by the Democrats. Many activists may have illusions that capitalism can get rid of the evil giant corporations and practice an idyllic true democracy where all businesses are local and small – and there will be more oddities yet to come. But the battle is joined! The ultra-rich have been called out! Class struggle, class warfare are acknowledged and brought into the open and a new generation of fighters for the people has thrown down its gauntlet to the rich. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta! Here is the rose, here dance!* the conditions cry out, as Karl Marx wrote so stirring long ago.

Let the fun begin. The capitalist rulers feigned support for democracy and tolerated the Occupy encampments at first but have now shown their true colors and smashed them. Occupy, with some worker support, has boldly shut down west coast ports twice. Obama, who should be named Obanka or Obush, has shown that the Democrats have the same agenda as the Republicans, destroying constitutional protections from indefinite detention and government assassination of ordinary citizens. The movement goes on. It will need revolutionary theory and organization; it is up to the genuine Marxists and activists to contribute that. But one thing is clear: a new wave of masses is fighting.

Great day in the morning!

By Tim Hall

Feeding the poor

Feeding the poor means a
breeding poor, and a breeding
poor means having to feed
the poor, and if we don't
feed the poor we won't have
a breeding poor so forced
starvation is the answer to
poverty. South Carolina says
so, and what's good enough
for Nazi Germany is good
enough for South Carolina.

By James Lautermilch

Burnt Offerings

(for those who perished in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire of
1911)

*Horrified and helpless, the crowds... looked up at the burning building, saw girl after
girl appear at the reddened windows, pause for a terrified moment, and then leap to the
pavement below, to land as mangled, bloody pulp. – Louis Waldman, eyewitness*

Because they were women
Because they were poor

In shadowy rooms,
garment workers toiled in Asch Building 's
upper floors, Greenwich Village , as green-eyed
owners – the *Triangle Shirtwaist Kings* --
boasted profit margins, bottom lines
proudly surveying their sweatshop
with royal heirs apparent in tow

They saw
scores of immigrant girls & women
from Italy & Russia, Catholics & Jews
Isabella, Yettie, Maria, Rose and more,
most between 16 & 23, jammed
into rooms filled with tables, chairs,
baskets, bolts of fabric, air roiling

with dust, dirty windows shut tight
doors locked so purses could be searched

They heard
the clatter of sewing machines, scissoring
cloth across wobbly-legged tables, high-pitched
cries of surprise & pain as needles stabbed
fingers caught by machines, crimson
rivulets mingled with white blouses,
working in haste for quotas
as foremen looked on, leaned in
scolded & threatened
faster, faster, faster!

Outside,
the wealthy parlayed & promenaded
along scenic parkway, parasols colored
like spring petals bursting along the path,
small-slippered ladies peacocked in Gibson-girl
waistshirts, curved bustles, swishing skirts

Gentlemen tipped bowler hats, stopping
to light thick cigars, backs turned against
the breeze as the horsecarts passed by,
hooves hitting paving stones smartly,
tails held high, bells rang out in soft March air

Inside,
the workers pressed on, fatigued
fingers sorting pile upon pile
lace tucks & cotton
damp with perspiration
faster faster faster! float the women
dreaming of Saturday night
strolls & moonlight, fresh air
Sunday rest

When suddenly,
near shift's end, an errant spark
ignited like tiny haystacks combusting
along the row, smoke swirled &
bellowed, stinging panicked eyes,
choking lungs as women stumbled
in flight, finding exits blocked,
padlocked, an impassable red-licked
stairwell, an iron fire escape
twisted & snapped, hurling frightened
workers to their death many stories below;
others rushed madly to freight elevator,
the lucky few crammed into compartment
as metal gates clanged

shut, descending to safety – one sister saved
the other lost in hellish blaze – some paused,
tottering on verge, jumped or fell into dark
shaft, collective coffin. Meanwhile, the *Triangle
Waistshirt Kings*, with heirs apparent, escaped
& prospered, bought another locked-door
sweatshop, but on the last day at Asch...

Those still trapped
during terrible moments when hoses &
ladders could not reach, with flames tugging
at clothes & hair, leapt from ledges – transfigured
into fireballs of flesh, bones, blood & breath,
lighting up the sky, screaming as they tumbled
to the ground while horrified crowds looked on

There,
policemen who had clubbed them,
arrested & harassed them during previous
strike action for safety, wages, union --
these same men knelt beside
their smoldering, broken bodies
& wept

146 burnt offerings to the god of mammon
146 sacrificed for industrial greed

Because they were women
Because they were poor.

By Nancy Ann Schaefer

God and Congress

My child, 'tis for the best, believe,
Big oil's broke, we must relieve,
Give tax breaks to the bonus-takers,
Bailouts to the movers-shakers,

Layoff slips to factory workers,
Also teachers, public shirkers,
Bust when unions organize
Strikes against the wealthy guys,

Privatize the health care plan,
Give it back to those who can

Make a profit free and clear
From your illness, death, and fear.

Subsidize the factory farm,
Only diners come to harm,
Then sell them drugs that do no good,
With side effects not understood.

Profiteers love foreign war,
So throw them money, call for more
Remote control to kill and maim;
Costs big bucks and that's the game.

My child, let them fob and fleece,
Your reward is heaven's peace.
God and Congress don't deceive:
'Tis best to give and not receive.

By Bill Witt

This body

This is the workingman's body,
Wiry and thin,
Muscled strangely,
Aching and quaking,
Chronically fatigued.

This is the workingman's body,
Shiftless and needful,
Addicted and deprived,
Desperate and impulsive.

This is the workingman's body,
Branded hard,
Health neglected,
Self-abused.

This is the workingman's body,
Breaking slowly,
Aging quickly,
Dying fast.

By Brian Looney



Grace the Madonna

Gravel pokes through the skin
on knees she swallows
his flesh inside her mouth
the garbage eagle groans
wrinkled twenty on the ground
another bag.

Whore
the sound means nothing
liquid high
body bartered
rushes down and in

Hot liquid sacrament
fired up with heat
plunged into maps of
dead-end roads

Weak phantom tears
the drop of blood
changes want to need.

crippled spider nods
crosses herself
and sleeps.

By Jessica Biker

Thoughts of an assembler

Five-thirty A.M. begins the race
Into the lot to look for a space
Through the plant door and on line by six
Oh my God, I wish I were sick.
The whistle blows, the line starts

Here comes a car ready for parts
Aim that headlight
Aim that headlight to the right
Aim that headlight to the left
Aim that headlight into the night
Aim that headlight time after time
Oh God where's the end of the line?
The whistle blows, the line goes down
Another day nowhere bound.

By Robert W. Cohen

Please don't take it personal if we close

Maybe I'll find a new job I suppose
but today I'm cashing my last check
don't take it personal if we close.

So says the employer that's how it goes
we can no longer stretch our own neck
maybe I'll find a new job I suppose.

Till then I'll try to stay on my toes
I must hold on to my self-respect
yes I will take it personal if they close.

Hate to draw unemployment heaven knows
but either that or I'll be a total wreck
maybe I'll find a new job I suppose.

Although my anger and disdain really shows
How could they allow this thing to take effect?
I'll damn sure take it personal if they close.

Something stinks it's not smelling like a rose
some cheap labor motive I suspect
maybe I'll find a new job I suppose
goddammit, I'll take it personal if they close!

By Don Ryan

Wrong stands trial

Wrong stood checking out the scene. He knew right off that a drama was being played out on the young accused Afrikan. Wrong walked over and sat down in the third row from the front. The young accused man noticed him right away. The man who had just come in was not only Afrikan, but he was also dressed in a smart, black sport coat, black pants, black shades. Wrong nodded at the youngster.

His name was Stash and he knew that the trial was not going well. He knew that his lawyer, Bill Jones, had sold him out during the guilt phase of the trial and now all that was left was the penalty phase where it was decided whether or not he would receive a sentence of life in prison or the death penalty. They were not good choices.

Everything pointed to his having killed the man but he hadn't. Nobody believed him, he was only seventeen years old. Up until now, he had no dealings at all with the police or courts. He found himself wondering who the dude was.

Wrong stared back at Stash. He took off his dark glasses. He looked directly into Stash's eyes. Within a few minutes he was reading Stash's mind, the fear, the confusion, even the gladness at seeing him there. He knew why he was there. His mission was to take this youngster's place.

Stash, too, became caught up in the powerful stare and a wave of telepathy began. Without moving his mouth, Wrong said to the boy, "Don't worry, Stash, I am here for you." Surprised to hear this voice in his head, Stash didn't flinch. Hope surged through him. Wrong continued, "My name is Wrong. I am the Right for all of the Wrong of the world. I know that you are on trial for a murder you did not commit." He let that information sink in for a moment and then he said, "I am here to liberate you."

Stash's heart began to race wildly. The first question that comes to mind was, "How are you going to do this liberating?"

Wrong said, "Stash, I'm going to take your place here. Without doubt, you are going to be sentenced to death. I am your future."

Stash was almost speechless. "How are you going to take my place?"

Wrong understood that it was Stash's youthfulness that made him ask these questions of doubt so he said, "Stash, stare even harder into my eyes. Yes, that's it. Now tell me who you see that I am."

Stash suddenly saw his mother's face in Wrong's. Then he saw himself appear. Twice more Wrong became someone else. Then he said, "Stash, with

my ability I can make people see me however I want to be seen. Today I am here to be you. I am asking only one thing of you and that is that once we change places you will leave this country and never come back. If you come back or choose not to leave, then surely you will die, because you will expose me for who I am. Wrong... The Man Nobody Knows."

Excitement was flowing through Stash's young body. "Tell me," he said to Wrong eagerly. "What must I do?"

Wrong replied, "So, I can trust that you are willing to leave the country and never return. All right. On the next break, ask the bailiff to allow you to use the bathroom. I will be waiting for you in the last stall. We will trade clothes... don't you worry my clothes will fit you. There will be \$6,000 in hundred-dollar bills in the inside jacket pocket. It will be enough to get you out of the country and set yourself up wherever you choose to go. You will find a passport in the pocket also. Start using the name on the passport as yours. You will also find four credit cards. You can use them however you like. Your account will always be paid in full no matter how much you spend."

The young man must have looked his gratitude and relief. Wrong's face softened. He said, "Are you ready?" The boy nodded yes.

Then Wrong shut down the telepathic communication. Stash blinked and came back to reality. He watched as Wrong stood up, put his glasses back on, and walked back out of the courtroom. Before the door closed, Stash could see him turn in the direction of the bathroom.

After about 20 minutes (which were the longest 20 minutes of Stash's young life) they finished with the witness and the judge called a 20-minute recess. Bill Jones looked at Stash, smiled, and told him to just stay put. "The hell with you," Stash replied. Knowing all too well that the young Black man hated him, Bill Jones left without another word.

Stash looked over to the deputy. "Excuse me sir," he said, his heart pounding with the excitement still racing his blood, "may I use the bathroom?"

The deputy smiled at him and said, "Sure, son."

As he started through the bathroom door he remembered what Wrong had told him. He leaned back toward the deputy and told him, "This may take a minute. I have to do a number two."

Jokingly the deputy told him, "Well, don't fall in."

Stash laughed, went to the last stall and opened it. Even prepared in advance, Stash was not prepared for what he saw. There was Wrong, standing totally naked, and looking exactly, from body to face, like Stash. It was like opening the door and finding himself. For a moment, even he was confused about who was who.

Wrong saw that the boy was about to say something so he put his finger to his lips. Telepathically he said, "You know what we have to do." Stash began to quickly undress. As he handed his clothes to Wrong, Wrong handed

his own clothes back to Stash. The last things Wrong handed over were the jacket and the glasses. Both men were now fully dressed. Wrong looked hard at Stash and the boy could feel his form changing. He glanced over at the mirror above the sink and felt another moment of shock. He no longer looked like himself. He looked like Wrong.

His heart swelled and emotion filled his eyes. Again, Wrong motioned him to silence. Quietly he said, "I wish you well, my young brother. Stay here until I have been taken back into the courtroom and then leave. Do not look back." Then he hugged Stash and after flushing the stool Stash watched as Wrong, looking exactly like him, left the bathroom and was gone. He waited 10 minutes feeling strangely calm and then walked out into freedom and the beginning of a new life... and never looked back.

Somehow he didn't worry about Wrong. He knew that this man, this angel, would be able to take care of himself.

Back in the courtroom, Wrong sat back down and continued the conversation Stash had begun with the deputy about Thursday night's football game. Bill Jones came in and sat down beside his client. He felt his client's eyes looking at him long and hard. Jones turned to stare back. "What's up, Stash?" he asked.

Wrong shook his head, "Nothing's up, dude," he said.

Something had changed in that client's voice, Bill Jones thought. He felt a cold chill suddenly run down his spine.

Wrong leaned toward him and said, "Check this out, Bill. I want to rap with the jury."

"You can't," Bill Jones said dismissively.

"What do you mean I can't?" said Wrong as Stash. "Whose trial is this?"

Bill looked at "Stash" condescendingly. He explained as if he were explaining to an idiot child not a young man of intelligence. "Right now," he said, "there is the possibility that you could get Life-Without-Parole. If you get up on that stand it will be the Death Sentence for sure."

"I will worry about the consequences," Wrong said. "You have done everything you can to get me this far. It is time for me to speak up for myself."

"What do you mean by that?" Bill Jones asked suspiciously.

Wrong leaned forward and whispered so that only Bill could hear. "You hate Blacks, Mexicans and Jews."

Bill Jones was angry. His face flushed a deep red. "I'd like to beat his young ass," he thought to himself. He was shocked to hear "Stash" answering his thoughts. "Any time you feel like trying just jump up."

The judge asked Bill Jones how much time he would need to call together his witnesses. Jones excused himself for a moment to confer with his client. He leaned toward "Stash" and said coldly, "If you really want to hang yourself, I can start with you up there on the stand."

Wrong smiled. "I'm the only witness you are ever going to need," he

told his attorney.

"All right then, here's how it is going to be. You'll get up on the stand and I'm going to ask you a few questions...."

Wrong held up his hand saying, "You will not do such a thing. From this point on I want control of my own defense."

Jones thought to himself, "Fine. Let him do himself in." He said, "Your Honor, my client wants to testify on his own behalf."

The judge nodded. "Come on up here, Mr. Taylor," he said. All eyes were fixed on Wrong as he stood up and walked to the witness stand. The courtroom clerk walked up to him and asked him to raise his right hand. "Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" he asked.

Wrong said, "I am the truth and a god to many." There was an outburst of laughter throughout the courtroom. Wrong remained impassive. Bill Jones blushed like a little girl. The prosecutor jumped up to make an objection but the judge found something fascinating about Wrong's presence and silenced the court overruling the prosecutor. The courtroom became quiet. The judge told the clerk that Wrong's response was good enough.

Wrong looked over at the jury. He could read each and every mind. Wrong could feel the positive vibes from the judge but the man would not allow his mind to be entered. By this Wrong knew he was the only honest man in the courtroom.

Wrong smiled. Bill Jones sat down. For ten seconds or longer Wrong said nothing at all. Then he began. "There is much negativity happening in this courtroom. As a man, it is easy to see that I stand no chance here. I could tell you that I did not kill that man and it would be the truth but who is going to listen to me? You have all convicted me of this murder already."

"Am I sorry for the death of this man? Hell yes, I am. I believe that everyone should be able to live his or her life to fulfillment without anyone stealing their life away. But I have not come here to talk about this. I have come here to talk about Wrong. Of course you all think you know the difference between right and wrong but let me tell you about another Wrong... the Wrong who is the Man Nobody Knows.

"Wrong is that Black Understanding Hero. He comes for the many Black people. Wrong is the only living Black who can make sense out of bad events and change them. He has experienced so much. He was born in the heart of slavery. He was born of the need to have a God who is not White or Yellow or Red. He was born of the need of Black people for a Black God. Wrong is the offspring of Erebus, spirit of darkness and father of chaos. He comes from the formless void. Little is known of his mother."

The courtroom was restless but spellbound. Not even the prosecutor could make it up from his chair to voice an objection.

Wrong continued. "Wrong has many purposes and many qualities. He appears out of nowhere. He is the quiet person in human form. It is said that

whenever he is seen, Death is somewhere close by. He is the only human myth that can come between Black people and the earth shattering powers of Unjustified Death and Racism. He either expresses the wrong of the world to those who cannot recognize it or he saves the innocent from certain death."

"I am Wrong. I am that man. You see before you someone you think that you recognize... the man you have convicted for all the wrong reasons."

Suddenly Bill Jones put his head on the table in front of him and started to laugh. A few of the jurors followed suit. They thought the young defendant had clearly gone out of his mind, and far from having and empathy or compassion, they laughed at him as if he were a fool.

Wrong shook his head sadly. He said, "You people have so much to learn and I do not have the time to teach you slowly all the ways you are wrong. All I can do is show you who I really am." Wrong looked at the judge. "May I stand, your Honor? He asked. The judge nodded yes.

Wrong stood up in the witness stand. He opened his arms, palms outward, and said, "You may have wondrous things but some of you have seen this?" And he turned himself from and Black man into a White. A gasp rang out through the courtroom. Bill Jones' mouth dropped open. Wrong laughed softly. "So now I have your attention. Funny you will listen to a miracle but you will not listen to the Truth. I am here to tell you that just as I am a part of Stash, so I am also a part of you. A human being is simply a human. You have conveniently forgotten that a Black man is a human being too. Learn that there is no difference between us. There was a shift in the air and he stood before them as a Mexican. Then he re-took the form of Stash and sat down.

There was utter silence in the courtroom and riveted attention.

"People," he said, "let's stop being wrong. The same way as you would want to be considered if it were you in the role of defendant so you should treat others. You never saw the real person, Stash Taylor, before you. All you was was the mirror image of your own hate. Look at me now and trust what your eyes witness for tomorrow you will see everything differently and I will not be a part of your tomorrow's thoughts and tomorrow's dreams. Bill Jones, you are one sorry human being. There is no excuse for your actions in this courtroom. You became a defense attorney to defend people but you gave Stash up to these people because of your own hate for Black people. For them you will not fight for justice. He did not do what he was accused of, Mr. Jones. You didn't care to even find that out. You weren't fair with him. You weren't honest with him. You weren't even a lawyer to him. I have half a mind to just take your ass out but even you, Mr. Jones, could possibly change and I do hope that you will in all the right ways."

With that, Wrong simply vanished before their very eyes.

The courtroom was locked in shocked silence. The deputy jumped up and drew his gun. Seeing him, the judge told him sharply to sit down before he hurt someone. "Who are you going to shoot?" The deputy looked one more time in the empty seat where Wrong had been sitting and sat down feeling very foolish.

The judge frowned in silence and he said, "People of the jury, your job is done. Case dismissed." The prosecutor finally found his feet and jumped up to protest. The judge said, "Protest what? That the man simply disappeared before our very eyes? What are you going to do about it?"

The prosecutor sat back down.

The judge addressed the court. "If any of you chooses to speak of what we have witnessed outside of this courtroom, that is your own business; but beyond saying that this case is dismissed, I will say no more. We cannot prosecute a person who has clearly ceased to exist."

A loud ringing laughter swept the courtroom that came from no living throat and Wrong's true voice was heard one more time. He said, "Without a shadow of a doubt, we all live innocently in a world of madness. We are taught to hate."

By Freddie Lee Taylor

Box D-32000

San Quentin State Prison

San Quentin, CA 94974

Soiled justice

(In North Carolina: for the Victims of Unjust and Wrongful Incarceration)

Behind granite rock
Where a prison clock
Strikes woe to men's liberty,
Its solemn toll
Grips each soul
Where air is no longer free.
In the cloistered womb
Of each cell tomb,
To the tune of a splashing mop,
Burns each bitter scar
From society's tsar:
The conniving Dirty Cop.
His badge is worn
On a chest of scorn
Echoing his doughnut soul.
While a pillar of lies
Frames his amoral eyes,
Corruption his daily goal.
A quick silent mode



Is his security code,
Should truth expose his slop.
Yet many a cell
Holds a man in hell,
At the bidding of the Dirty Cop.

By Richard Mahoney

Wrong Confluence

"Shenandoah" . . .
"Potomac" . . .

Such native names are poetic
enough. No need to add the word "river."

I watch them come together between granite cliffs,
flowing over and around boulders that once fell

into the streambed, or else emerge
as water grinds its way through centuries past.

At this moment the current is peaceful enough for rafters,
for paddlers of kayaks, also for the geese and herons.

I spy an eagle hovering above the portal
to the railroad tunnel on the North bank.

On this spot, in 1761 a ferry was established where Robert
Harper had already built his cabin. I do not doubt that you

will now recall why the town of "Harper's Ferry" is historic.
Today, visiting again after fifty years, I discover a footbridge

next to the railroad tracks, decide it must have been constructed
since the last time I stood waving to an engineer

as his freight train passed over this trestle.
I think too of the visitors' center which has since

appeared above the town, the new roadways,
the shuttle bus on which we traveled down.

Some things do change, I tell myself.

Walking half-way to the Maryland shore I stand
on a perch – not as high as an eagle's perch

but high enough for me to see how the brownish water
from the north and greenish from the south flow

side-by-side, each keeping to its own half of the channel
for as far downstream as I am able to see. Then,

considering again the reason so many pilgrims travel here
(it is not just for the scenery), I visualize the clash

of two human rivers, of different colors, and how even today
each still flows on its own side of the channel – though we

are half a century downstream from my previous visit,
three times that from the moment when a raging torrent sucked

John Brown's band of freedom seekers into its flood. I walk
back, contemplating how both honeysuckle and poison ivy

grow in such profusion along these riverbanks.
Some things do not seem to change, I tell myself.

Some things do not seem to change.

By Steve Bloom



*"I, John Brown,
am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land
will never be purged away but with blood."
—Written on the day of his execution.*

The Movement, San Francisco, California
Vol. 8, 23, April 1988. Artist: Frank Owsen

Cora Sings Soprano

For the past five years Cora had enjoyed working at the bank, at least until recently. She'd started out as a teller where she liked assisting customers who lined up at her window and where she got along well with her fellow workers. Impressed by her "dedication and skill," Mr. Harding, the manager of Lincoln Savings and Loans, promoted her after three years to customer service. She found the desk job even more satisfying because she could spend more time

helping clients resolve their banking problems.

About a month ago she'd proudly announced to her mother, "Mr. Harding wants me to take on teller supervision." She now had the added responsibility of going into the tellers' area after closing hours to examine each one's balance sheet. If she detected a discrepancy between the amount of money entered on the deposit slips and the amount in hand, the teller had to fill out a report. It was her job, as Mr. Harding had made clear to her, to hold the tellers to the same level of accountability as she'd held herself when she was one of them.

Since her appointment she'd discovered that an increasing number of discrepancy reports were being filed and, much to her distress, not only by the two new tellers but also by the two experienced ones. The bank was losing money. It was her responsibility to confront the tellers.

When she'd first spotted the losses, she'd decided to wait and see if things improved. Her success so far at the bank had come not from pushing people around but by winning their approval. Besides, she'd expected Joyce, the head teller, who along with Mr. Harding also received copies of the reports, to admonish the delinquent tellers. After all, Joyce worked side by side with them every day.

From her desk at the back of the customer service area, Cora had a commanding view of her colleagues seated in the two rows in front of her. Through the space between the massive marble pillars connected by gold-colored ornamental iron railings, she looked across the stone floor of the expansive lobby to where the tellers stood hunched over at their barred windows. She wondered if they had it in for her because she'd been chosen as supervisor instead of Joyce or one of them.

It was with some apprehension now that she opened the folder on her desk containing the reports for the past week. She'd avoided looking at them, but earlier this morning Mr. Harding had phoned. He wanted to see her in his office at the end of the work day. She hoped he was not calling about the tellers. As she turned the pages, her anxiety rose: the number of reports was up.

In an attempt to distract herself, she glanced at the photo on her desk taken last summer of her and her mother standing in front of the oak doors of the Lutheran Church they attended. Each had dark blond hair, but Cora's hung down long and stood out against her purple choir robe while her mother's was short and slightly curled. Cora liked the photo because it called attention to something she cherished: her singing. What she didn't like was how the blush reddening her fair complexion made her look younger than twenty-eight.

When she'd visited her mother's row house in Woodhaven last week -- her own apartment in Queens was just a few subway stops away -- the one thing she'd decided not to talk about was the tellers. She didn't want the problem to cast a shadow on the image of the successful businesswoman she preferred to project. However, her mother had detected her distress and asked what was wrong.

"Marge, your figures don't balance," I said to her," Cora had recounted, sitting at the small, wooden table in her mother's kitchen and cutting celery for the salad. Her mother stood facing her in front of the stove, a cream-colored apron pressed tightly against her large bosom. "So she glared at me -- she has a frown on her face all the time, even when she's not upset -- and said, 'It's just a small amount. And I didn't steal it, if that's what you're thinking.' Then she walked off in a huff."

"I know what that's like." She turned and attended to the vegetables boiling on the stove. "I don't always get my bankbook to agree with the bank's statement either."

"But Mother, this is different. This is her job. And it's happening more often. The other tellers, too, are giving me a hard time." The shrill sound in her own voice surprised Cora.

Her mother stopped stirring the pot. Ladle in hand she faced Cora. "I hope you didn't use that tone of voice with her."

"No, I just said, 'You're going to have to fill out a discrepancy report.'" Cora tried to duplicate the solicitous tone of her original response. "Even when I get their reports later, there are mistakes." She scraped the cut celery into a bowl.

"I thought you told me they all liked you."

"In customer service, yes." Cora spoke now with less agitation. The image of her fellow workers mingling around her or someone's desk came to mind, and she felt the tension in her body diminishing. *"But when I go into the tellers' cage," -- she meant to say area but didn't stop to correct herself -- "it's a different world. I feel I'm not wanted or needed. I go out of my way to be helpful, and they never thank me the way my clients do."* She put down the knife in her hand and leaned backward in her chair. "Maybe I should ask Mr. Harding to take me off supervision."

Her mother winced. "No, no Cora," she said. "That wouldn't look good at all. Mr. Harding has done so much for us."

Though Cora was staring at the photo on her desk, her mind was

preoccupied with her mother's words: "He's done so much for us." They revived a painful memory. After graduating from college, she'd moved into her own apartment in Jackson Heights and gotten a job as a sixth grade teacher at a nearby public school. At the end of her first year, the principal had criticized her "classroom management skills," and hadn't renewed her contract. Instead of returning to teaching, she'd decided to try another field. When nothing materialized, her mother said, "Move in with me, Dear." Cora's father had died of a heart attack while Cora was in college and her mother was alone. The prospect of moving back in without her father as a buffer did not appeal to her.

Then her mother, who banked at Lincoln, intervened and got Mr. Harding to take her on as a teller. Cora was uncomfortable relying on her, but with no money coming in to pay the rent, she'd swallowed her pride, took the job and kept her apartment.

Now looking up from the photo on her desk, she glanced over to the cushioned chairs at the entrance to the customer service area. Seeing no clients waiting for her help, she examined the contents of the manila folder again, hoping she'd been mistaken.

Her dark blue skirt stretched tightly between the seat of her swivel chair and the padded support at the small of her back. Her mother insisted she wear dress suits rather than slacks: "They make you look more business-like, and you know, Cora, people judge you by your appearance." She slipped off her low-heeled shoes and rubbed her toes over the grass-green rug spread out beneath all the desks. The soft touch moved like osmosis up her limbs.

She decided she'd better speak to Joyce before meeting with Harding. As usual, the air in the tellers' area at the end of the banking day smelled stuffy even though the confined space had an open ceiling. After the tellers left, she approached Joyce who was seated on a backless stool which supported her ample hips. She placed her hand gently on Joyce's shoulder. "Got a minute?" she said. "Just wanted to talk to you about all the discrepancy reports."

Though Joyce's competence with numbers and details wasn't as good as hers, Cora envied how well she got along with the tellers. Even more important: Joyce had no ill feeling toward her. What Cora had picked up from her customer service colleagues in the coffee room was that Joyce had been passed over for the supervision job because Harding did not regard her "as a team player."

"Yes," she said, putting down her pen. Her small oval head was out of proportion to her large body, and the light green of her eyes stood out against her black skin. "I didn't like what I saw, but I haven't said anything to them because I didn't want to go over your head."

Cora looked down. Joyce's candid response had touched a nerve. Cora had avoided her responsibility. On the floor beneath Joyce's stool, two black patches blotted the gray linoleum.

"I'm glad you brought it up, though. Now we can deal with it together." Her eyes brightened.

"Yes, let's do that." Cora felt relieved as she slid over one of the other stools and adjusted herself comfortably on it.

Joyce slowly removed her silver-framed glasses and with her thumb and forefinger pinched the bridge of her nose. "What do you think's the problem, Cora?"

"I don't know." She was pleased that Joyce deferred to her.

"Are they careless or lazy or doing this to get back at me?"

"Not you, Cora. Harding. They see you as his proxy."

"What do you mean?" Cora grasped her knees tightly.

"He won't raise their pay, Cora. They don't have a union to speak up for them, and so," she reached for a discrepancy report and waved it in the air, "this is their way of sending him a message."

Salary hadn't concerned Cora when she'd signed on as a teller. She was more anxious about how her friends in the choir and her mother would regard her if she had no job.

"That makes no sense. They should be grateful to him for hiring them."

"True and he should be grateful to them, too. He could show it by giving them a little more money. Or by asking them for some input on the bank's vacation or sick leave policy? Or for suggestions about the dress code or length or number of coffee breaks?"

Cora was surprised. When she was a teller, she'd heard talk about these complaints, but that's all it amounted to. "But why would they resort to this?"

"As I see it workers don't cause problems if the pay is fair, or if the morale is good and makes up for the money they're not getting. Here, the tellers feel they're losing out on both counts. And so they justify what they're doing by saying, 'You get what you pay for.' Now don't get me wrong, I wouldn't do what they're doing myself. But I can understand it." She pointed upward, "The VPs on the second floor are getting big bonuses, to say nothing of the president. And the folks at the desks," she twisted the bulk of her body around and pointed to the customer service area, "make a good deal more than tellers." Turning back to Cora, she continued, "Not that you folks out there don't deserve it. But fair is fair."

Embarrassed, Cora couldn't refute what Joyce had said. Joyce reached for the large white handbag on the counter behind her and placed it on her lap.

"My grandmother once told me she remembered as a child her parents singing in the fields with the other slaves while they worked. She said they sang to keep their minds off the misery." She clasped her purse and fixed Cora with her gaze. "I think it was more than that. I think it was their way of saying they weren't just going to sit back and take it. Sure, when they bent their backs in the field they were taking it. Heck, Cora, they didn't have a choice. But when they sang together, they were saying they're not taking it. They're not bending

over on the inside."

She reached into her purse and drew out a white handkerchief. "And singing together lifted their spirits. It made up a little for what they weren't getting from their owners." She glanced at the discrepancy report on the counter. "Maybe it was their way of sending a message. They were down but not out." Joyce wiped her brow with the handkerchief and put it back into her purse.

Cora loosened her grip on her knees. Something in her resonated with what Joyce had said. She too got a lift from her singing. More so than from her work in customer service or as a teller, engaging as they were. When she sang in the choir she felt as if the energy expended all day serving the needs of others had shifted to serving her own, and as if, at least for the moment, a cage door had opened, and she was free to fly.

Joyce put her purse under her arm and stood up to signal that she'd said all she'd had to say. Cora could make of it what she wanted.

As they walked out of the tellers' area together, Cora realized that Joyce reminded her of the sopranos in her choir. She, like they, sang with such self-confidence. Cora had once wanted to sing soprano. Her mother, also an alto, had persuaded her not to change even though Liz Juniper, the choir director, who needed sopranos, had told her that with a little training she could do it.

When she entered Harding's office, he motioned to her to take the hardbacked chair in front and to the left of his desk. He waved some papers in the air and said in a belligerent voice, one Cora had been told about but never experienced, "Would you explain to me what's going on with all these discrepancy reports?"

She lifted her arms and folded them across her chest. It was there she felt the sting.

"Why've there been so many in the last few weeks?" With his thumb he flipped through the reports as if counting them.

Cora quickly slid forward in her chair. It was a reflex action. As if the countless hours of service she'd provided for him and the bank had instinctively taken possession of her body and thrust it forward in her defense. She rested her hands on the leg that was crossed and clutched it tightly. Softly, she said, "I've spoken to Joyce about it."

"What about the tellers? Have you spoken to them?" His dark eyes stared hard at her. "Didn't it occur to you that you should've nipped this in the bud?"

When Harding stood up and stretched his arms outward and said, "Cora, this is not what I expected of you," she couldn't help noticing how his gesture resembled that of the full-length portrait of the bank president hanging on the wall behind him. She had little doubt that Harding was speaking for him

and that he'd expected of her what the president expected of him. The word proxy popped into her mind. He was the president's stand-in and – maybe the tellers were right – she was his.

"What kind of message is being sent if nothing is being done?" He pressed his palms down on the hard, oak surface of his desk. Cora's own question stayed bottled up: What kind of message are you, who are avoiding the problem, sending the tellers?

"The losses are adding up. So what's to be done?" He didn't wait for her response. "I'll tell you what's to be done. Tomorrow before the bank opens, you make it clear to the tellers that any loss of money will be taken from their salary!"

The phone on his desk rang. He picked up the receiver and swiveled his chair around. His long neck and small head, thinly covered with black hair combed straight back, stuck out above the top of the chair. Whenever she'd seen his tall frame moving through the bank lobby with his chin protruding and

bobbing up and down, he reminded her of a giraffe. From a distance he'd appeared to glide with the grace of a superior being. From the day her mother introduced him to her, she'd looked up to him as exemplifying the ideal of selfless dedication her mother had imbued her with.

Harding wheeled his chair around, hung up the receiver, and sat back with his fingers intertwined and pressed against his belt. "If there's no improvement, there'll be consequences." His tinny voice dwelled on the last word.

Cora rose slowly from her chair as if a weight were pressing down on her. Making her way to the door, she felt his disapproval like a cold wind at her back. When she returned to the customer service area, the two rows of desks were all empty. Mechanically she opened a drawer and slid in some folders. The long, gray metal arms of the round clock at the far end of the lobby read four o'clock. The only sounds puncturing the silence sprang from a wooden broom knocking against the stone wall of the deserted lobby.

On her way toward the revolving door, the repetitious click of her heels reverberating up to the vault made her aware not only of the hollow space here in the lobby, the heart of the bank, but also of the hollow feeling in her own heart. Was this the return she was getting for all her input? Was this the payoff for all the resources she'd invested in the bank? She'd expected better. But so, said Harding, had he. She'd failed him. Worse still, she'd failed herself. She'd expended too much trying to please him and others, her mother included. Here she was advising clients not to let expenditures exceed assets, and she'd failed to do the same for herself. Now she understood better the plight of the tellers. The return for their services was also out of balance. But at least, like Joyce's forebears, they'd found a way not to just "sit back and take it," but to send Harding a message.

"Well, what brings you here on a week day? Tellers?" said Cora's mother who was seated across from her at the dining room table.

After her meeting with Harding earlier in the afternoon, Cora had decided to pay her a visit. "Not any more." Cora stirred her coffee as she recounted her talk with Joyce.

Her mother listened, the porcelain cup in her hand never reaching her lips. When Cora had finished, her mother put the cup down and said, "That's terrible! There's no excuse for that kind of behavior. They should be grateful to Mr. Harding."

Cora didn't want to talk any more about the tellers. She had a message to deliver. She would build up to it slowly. "Speaking of him," she said, "he called me on the carpet today. Poor teller supervision." She made sure not to allow any self-pity to mar her candid statement.

"But you're not to blame!" Her mother reached out to touch Cora's hand hoping, or so it seemed to Cora, her own resentment would be transferred to her daughter.

Cora slipped her hand out from under her mother's. "Yes, Mother, I am."

"I didn't tell you what Joyce said about me." The recollection of Joyce's voice, rich in texture and with none of Harding's rant, strengthened her resolve. "The tellers see me as Harding's proxy. And they're right. I've been more worried about pleasing him than helping them.

"But you've gone out of your way to help them," her mother was now pleading.

"Yes, Mother, but not in a way that mattered. All I wanted was to get his and their approval." She felt her voice rising. It had the ring of confidence, similar to the sound she associated with the sopranos. "I was a proxy." She placed her hand on top of her mother's. "And not just for him." She paused to let the message sink in.

Cora could see in her mother's eyes that she was struggling to make sense of what her daughter was saying.

"But the tell-

"The tellers," said Cora firmly, "are Harding's problem to deal with. I have my own." Then, gently squeezing her mother's hand, she said softly, "Tomorrow I'm going to tell him to take me off teller supervision."

"But Cora "

Before her mother could finish her sentence, Cora said, "I'll stay on in customer service. That's where I belong. I'm not good at managing people." She glanced down at her cup. It was filled to the brim. "And one more thing."

"What else?" her mother said, nervously, but, Cora hoped, perhaps with some understanding, as well.

"I'm going to tell Liz Juniper at our next rehearsal that I want to sing soprano."

By Enrico Raulli

Monsoon

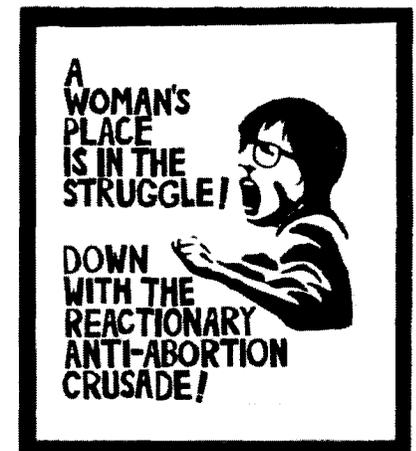
he thought her head was filled with blanks
thirty-five years dropped slowly through a sieve
before she could hear the explosion
of her own voice
grace of her own words

like a flower under a rock
she turns to the sun's face
today
everything is possible
all scars covered in star dust
all words fallen into place

By Lana Santorelli

I was told

not to go into that neighborhood
not to date that guy
not to bring that friend home
not to associate with them
but I went into that neighborhood
when they weren't looking
I dated that guy -- on the sly
I associated with everyone
behind their backs
all this creeping around
pissed me off
i tried to bring
my friend home
and she was told to leave
So we did



By Cathy Porter

Honest patriotism

At the gate, he turned to wave,
and the air swallowed a chill
that stuck around
long after his departure.
She could pray, but to whom
would such prayers be directed?
The gods of luck had long ago
deserted her --
though the gods of
bitterness and anger
were always there,
waving a hymnal in her face,
enticing her to a verse of
"Fuck This War,"
which always sounded good
after a few rounds of hatred
mixed with shots of intense fear.

In the fields

The fields have spoken:
WE NEED YOU.
White people don't want us --
we hope you still do.
Water runs off their backs
like the words shouted from
the occasional stray car;
the sun never takes a time out.
Family of 5 -- but it might
as well be 10. "Dream Big"
echoes in their brains; a hollow slap.
But his mind wanders
to those nights under a liquored
moon, when tequila and lies
whispered under oath
smoothed over the jagged edges.
Now, he watches her -
bent over and near-crippled -
make more love to these fields
then she has to him lately.
"Illegals go home!"
This slap isn't hollow.
Too exhausted to fire back;
he is home, and sometimes
you can't go back.

By Cathy Porter

The Tunisian revolution

It started with Mohamed Bouziz, gunning an unstoppable bullet with his death.
He was 26, married with children. Had a university degree but couldn't find
employment. Had a market place, was a hawker. Had his things confiscated by
a woman police. He protested and she slapped him, the humiliation of it all! He
tried to pursue the case with the authorities but they ignored his complaints. He
committed suicide by electrocuting himself, the speaking protest, a tidy rhythm.
Tunisia exploded and Ben Aziz was kicked out... The Arab world woke up and
it's now a boiling pot... One country after another, each, a long black hour from
unribboning decades of dictatorships. Could this be the real start of the third
world war?

The Egyptian revolution

Young babies, young children, young people out welling, youngling,
unwarping. Christians and Muslims taking us to the edge of intention and show
us what lies beyond doubt. Old men down warping, fathers and mothers. The
Israeli press called them stray dogs. But the figures kept ballooning. It started
with tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, then millions... Cairo is
bustling; a mass mortality horizon, Alexandria and Monsourci city are swamped.
Tahrir, the liberation square is the hub of this monsoon chanting "the nation
wants the ouster of the regime." The day's song is a lament drawn out like a
final breath lost in the stars. Its millions wearing the country's flag as if the
pharaohs have thumped every other country at the CAF African nation's cup to
win it again, jubilant, passionate, angry... It's a carnival atmosphere. It's a
nation raising its bread, the symbol of its suffering and hunger. It's a nation
crucifying effigies of its napoleon. Its a nation waving placards written with the
fine point of their anger and pain "Mubarak go to hell" "America butt out" "Tel
Aviv is mourning" "Mubarak leave- we want to live." They name the forms of
control, the youths screaming for an open road to somewhere. Over 30 years of
mis-governance, human rights abuses, curfews..., of suffering. It's over 30 years
in which America and Israel ruled by robot controlling Mubarak. Giving the top
brass of army and security the loot of the 2 billion dollars, American taxpayer's
money: just to protect Israel. Israel would joke "we have one person controlling
80 plus millions of enemies" now they have to face the 80 plus million enemies
across its borders. Israel is almost a babbling child, afraid, scared....

The Libyan war

Gadaffi, the giraffe, that phylactery-bound, fringed prophet has now taken the whole country to ransom, pelting his people with bullets, bombing whole towns into rubble, his needles of bombs pointing eastwards. East is revolutionary, the uprising, the wars for towns, adding to strategic places? Western finger in the war, NATO at its games again and they want the ouster of Gadaffi, bombing as usual innocent people and towns into rubble or collateral damage, that clever coinage of terms... Even though I don't subscribe to NATO's ulterior motives of invading other countries without a by-your -leave but 41 years under one dictator is far worse than NATO's games minus those stupid killings. But Gadaffi has to realise as soon as possible that a man who lacks the means to an end is headed towards a shapeless wilderness. He should ask Mubarak? He should know that too often self-induced addictions to grand delusions cause a man to plot his own undoing. NATO or Gadaffi answers, both are not the answers to Libya. It should always be about the people.

The real nuclear threat

Earthquake, tsunami, and then a nuclear disaster engulfing the skies with plumes of smoke, smog. Japan is now a threat, radiation threat 10 000 times more in its waters. Places that are over 1000 miles are scared, over 28 000 confirmed dead, thousands left homeless, thousands still missing trapped inside this cold intelligence as close as death. It took 28 days their naked emperor (their prime minister) to visit the disaster area. Like caution in the morning of first meeting, maybe he waited until he was sure he didn't even have to run out of Japan at that, from his Tokyo offices and also when he was told it was safe to visit the radiation threatened area. After all this is the century when we like death to be someone else's little bundle in an unknown country. Fukushima is worse than Chernobyl 86 Russia, claiming a now that history makes and records. 6-9 months to clear the radiation threat, and with what effects.... why isn't the western world ablating the right or wrong of this or that country (Japan) to have nuclear capacities, until we begin to hate this sinner, loving every of its sins...

By Tendai Mwanaka

The psychologist of torture

Invited by the U.S. Army,
the doctor
stands by, observes
methods of interrogation,
information gathered.

If the subject screams in pain,
the doctor
notes time, decibels, any
loss of consciousness.

At home at supper, the doctor
eats a quiet pizza
with a quiet wife,
quiet children.

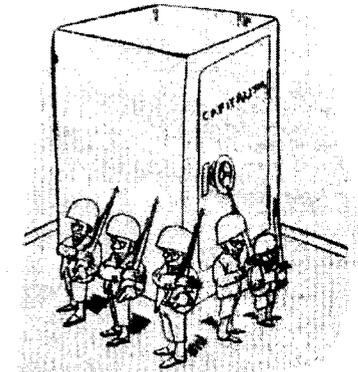
By William Meyer, Jr

Poem for Roberto Vargas and the Nicaraguan freedom fighters

this poem is for you Roberto
and for Ed "Foots" Lipman too
this poem is for every poet
whoever paced the cellblocks of San Quentin
Folsom, Attica, and Neil Island
or fought the people's struggle in Chile
Cuba or Nicaragua

this poem is for those who walk
the dream of freedom
with guerrilla visions
in their hearts and eyes

this poem is for those
who gave their lifeblood
to wash the streets free of oppression
for those who rest in heroic
and not so heroic graves
in the struggle for human dignity



I sit here in my seventy-fifth year
thinking of young boys
who have fought the real war
of grieving mothers and widows
thinking of young girls with color-book eyes
young women in black suspender belts
and knee high leather boots
with revolutionary roots
thinking of how the words come too late
and never say enough
knowing that in the Buddha Temple of life
all things must die
knowing there is no survival
no tarot cards horoscopes or incantations
to bring back the dead

I walk the midnight supermarket of death
thinking of Lorca and that long dirt road
thinking of the execution wall
the hangman's noose
ethnic cleansing ovens
and genocide
hearing the gypsy ballad
that sings to the heavens
knowing there is a strange code
to this language
we are addicted too
as Gene Fowler pointed out
evil spelled backwards is live
being made into a State
automated robot is evil
but dying is not evil
for it is in its whole
the disintegration
the bacterial feeding which
in turn is a live process
and so the fight goes on
and must go on until every street
has been cleared of assassins
until every newborn
is encircled in a poem
the spirit living on
in those passed the baton

the vision cannot be killed
even as we retreat into
the depths of our being
listening to the blood

beat solid against the walls
of the heart knowing
there are secrets in the bones
that cannot be denied
or sold out to the whims
of others

Sleep well my comrades
Only the flesh is gone
Your strength lives on
in those who dared
to reach out and kiss
the sun

By A.D. Winans

The ballad of John Henry, Stagolee and John Brown

I am nine pounds poundin' through rock like a gun
An' my fate weighs a ton
An' my fate weighs a ton
I am nine pounds poundin' through rock like a gun
And my fate weighs a miserable ton.

Got me workin' to death under angry white sun
For a shack n' a crumb
For a shack n' a crumb
Got me workin' to death under angry white sun
For a shack n' a measly crumb.

I am 32-20 an' killin' for fun
An' my hate weighs a ton
An' my hate weighs a ton
I am 32-20 an' killin' for fun
An' my hate weighs a terrible ton.

I am cleansing this land of the evil it's done
An' some blood's gonna run
An' some blood's gonna run
I am cleansing this land of the evil it's done
An' some blood's gonna bubble n' run.

By Christian J. Weaver
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Only, TN 37140

Room at the Top

So it was like this: how could I break loose from the containment factor, release the master parking brake – you know, kick loose and escape that D-9 bulldozer that's behind me pushing for all it's worth? Pushing like a wave of karma, fate, ill fortune, or whatever terms you're comfortable with. But aside from smoldering under the weight of destiny, part of it is the health issues, all the big and little problems that creep up on you over time and get tangled into a giant ball. For twenty-five years I weighed somewhere around 150 pounds, and I could run like a gazelle, run five or ten miles at a stretch if I wanted to. Matter of fact, when I was thirty-three years old, I still could still knock out a mile in just over five minutes. Jesus got spiked at age thirty-three. Is there some kind of mystical connection here?

Nowadays I drink too much vodka. Weigh 180 and I feel cumbersome and heavy.

First came the asthma. Came right of nowhere while I was in the middle of a bad cold. It cut my lungpower down by a third, and I didn't have any health benefits. The young woman doctor – I think she was from India – put a stethoscope to my chest and listened, then offered a professional frowning of her brow. "How long have you had asthma?" she asked.

"I've never had asthma."

"You got it now," she said.

Asthma for chrissake? I couldn't believe it. Then the allergies started, and after that the arthritis and basal cell skin cancer. I mean no one ever took me aside and said, "The sun is wrecking your skin young man. Stop running around half naked all summer long, stop sunbathing!"

I worked outdoors in my twenties, surfed, hiked, biked, and laid out in the sun. Sunshine was holy and good, golden nourishment for body and soul ... I didn't have a clue. The government was busy protecting me from all the things I didn't want to be protected from, but they never ran public-service ads warning dopes like me that I was irreversibly damaging my skin and risking various skin cancers ... and melanoma for chrissake.

And here's the funny part – not funny ha, ha, but funny as in odd – my grandfather on my mother's side is French-Canadian and he's five-eighths Chippewa, or so the documentation says. He married Grandmother who is one-fourth Cheyenne, so that makes my mom almost half-Indian and me almost a quarter-blood. Mom didn't like being stigmatized as a "half-breed redskin," residue from the small-town bigotry where she grew up, so eventually she began telling people she was part Italian to explain away her darker skin and her jet-black hair. Although my dad, good solid Scots-Irish top to bottom – the Kneelands and the McKettricks – was so taken by her striking looks, high

cheekbones and flashing dark eyes. I don't think he gave a shit what she was. Plus I've seen the old pictures. Mom had a great figure back in the day. But anyway, I don't fully understand how genes and genomes function – scientifically speaking – however, in spite of my dose of Native American blood, my ass is pure alabaster white, I have hazel-green eyes and light-brown hair and you would never suspect I was anything other than good old western European stock.

My sister, on the other hand, is dark like Mom – and I can remember in grade school -- she was two years behind me – how kids would tease her and say she was a Mexican. Back then we lived north of the border by about a hundred miles and there was definitely a downside to being mistaken for a Mexican. I hate to admit this, but there was a period during my teenage years when I told friends my sister was my half sister, you know, to distance myself.

So ... getting back to the original subject. What is with that containment thing anyway? I can't precisely put a finger on it, and I can't make up my mind if the problem is inside of me, or if it's inherent to the world in which I am trapped. Let me clarify that. A man is in the dark and all he knows is that something smells like shit. And it's always smelled like shit as long as he can remember. Eventually he decides – lacking any substantial evidence to the contrary – it must be he himself who stinks, because what else could it be? And in this way he becomes the target of his own accusations, his own finger pointing and self-hatred.

"My life stinks. I stink. and it's my own fault, and no matter what I do I can't escape the stench," he says to himself. But then one day in the midst of this darkness, a light shines down from above, as if somebody has flipped a switch, and what the poor bastard realizes is that he's up to his armpits in a cesspool – so of course he smells like shit. And the entity with the magic light reaches down and snatches him out of the sewer and says, "Go to the river and cleanse yourself, head to toe, and you will never smell that stench again."

Seriously. You do get what I'm saying, right? Either I'm all fucked up or the world's all fucked up, or it's a combination of the two. This is the total circumference of the problem.

The other approach is to ask where all that sewage came from in the first place and how did I get myself in up to my armpits? Was the cesspool innate to planet Earth, the universe, innate to life and the human world... or was it a byproduct of circumstances, of arbitrary conditions, or was it somebody else's intentions? I'll remind you that we're using sewer water as a symbol here, so don't get anal retentive about the details. Okay?

I can tell by your facial expression and body language that we're not connecting here. So let's try this from another angle. The first thing I like to do is divide my observations of reality and the world into logical opposites. For example: you have light and dark, and absolute light is the farthest end of the scale in one direction and absolute dark is on the other. It's the same for temperature: absolute zero on one end and absolute super-heated atomic

dissolution at the other. We also have something like order versus chaos. And of course, philosophically speaking, each of these dichotomies is the opposite side of the same coin, yet in that sense they are also interdependent. Light cannot exist without darkness acting as its comparative juxtaposition. Right? It's the same for losers and winners.

So... I look at myself in the mirror and I see a failure, more or less. No big career (I'm a middle-age mechanic at the local car dealership), no wonderful wife and kids, no money to speak of, no house or land, just my own tired face in that mirror, living day-to-day and doing shitwork. And trust me, being an auto mechanic is basically shit. It's dirty and greasy, uncomfortable mindless repetitive work that leaves you with grimy fingernails and the whiff of oil and burnt carbon clinging to your skin. Plus don't forget about breathing too much brake-lining dust - there's a sure way to get lung cancer. And I make a lousy 30K a year with no benefits. That ain't no party-time lifestyle, although there are plenty of people who got it worse than me. But I know for damn sure that I'm a lot closer to the bottom than the top, even though I'm smarter than you might think and have a pretty good vocabulary.

Not to mention, watch how fast this whole goddamn country comes screeching to a halt when there's nobody to fix the cars and trucks and buses and every other mechanical thing with an internal combustion engine and handfuls of gears and bearings and seals and... well, you get what I'm saying. Try growing your own wheat, try mining your own coal. Because if rich people couldn't hire poor people, then they'd have to take out their own garbage and unplug their own toilets - and of course fight their own wars.

You see I'm not stupid, and just because I'm stuck being an auto mechanic who can't even afford a house doesn't mean I'm some kind of second-rate human. I had my daydreams, had lots of them. I wanted to be other things, and I think I could've been if things were different, but then that's where the containment factor comes back into the picture, the invisible walls and what I said about that D-9 bulldozer pushing me from behind.

Because it seems like to me, looking back on my own life, that every time I tried to steer myself from one path and to another, I ended up back on the very road I was trying to escape - I mean come on, what's with that? The apologists will say, "You made choices, you're responsible." But I want you to really think about something. If a man or woman, all things being equal, actually chooses losing over winning, then we need to wonder about the content of their mind. Why would anyone freely choose to be lesser than greater? Unless of course something was wrong with the mechanism of choice. The other possibility is that some people are programmed to fail. Then the question is, who did the programming? And I've heard some people say that slavery in America never really ended, it was just given a new name - employee.

I already know what you're going to say. I'm my own worst enemy, I suffer self-defeating behavior, I'm neurotic, I'm manifest self-fulfilling prophecy, etc. I admit, I once bought into that BS too, and that's why I looked at myself in the mirror and pointed a finger at myself, that's why I hated myself, because I figured it was my fault. Some people are winners and others are losers and I'm

one of the losers. Case closed. I don't deserve to be a winner.

So let me tell you about Rooster. His real name is Roberto Morales, and in his spare time he raises chickens and fighting cocks, so that's why we call him "Rooster." He's close to twenty years younger than me, but old for an apprentice mechanic that is. And he's Mexican, has too many gang-style tattoos, drinks and smokes too much, but he's one of life's true characters. He has dark, intense eyes, and you can see in his eyes that he's thinking, always thinking, trying to understand things and find some way out of the big maze. The first time I met him I figured he'd had a hard childhood, I saw it in his face. Probably got kicked around by a drunken father, poor as dirt. *A fuckin' Mexican* (that's what the white boys say behind his back), gangs and drugs, living in racist Southern California - the whole bit.

But he's not dumb, no sir, not by any means. Sure, he's uneducated, just like me, but he's got a damned good brain, and he thinks about life in ways other people never even dream. And he has an aura of kindness about himself, in his voice, in his tone, and the way he shows respect and tries to understand how it is for the other guy. He's conscious of his position in life, knows the pecking order, realizes his limitations, but he also knows that he could have been something else. He said that to me once, when we were talking about how things are.

"Jorge," he said (he calls me Jorge), "I know the way it is ... I'm an ugly Mexican (actually he's handsome in his own way), and white people are afraid of me and they don't want us Mexicans here, but I know I have it inside me, and I could have done a lot of other things ... maybe I still can."

I nodded. I understood what he was saying - more than understood it, I felt it, but I also saw those invisible walls closing in around him, that big bulldozer pushing, relentlessly pushing from behind along that same old road. Rooster has hope, hope he can break loose from the containment, the walls, and the order of things. But I'm beginning to think that neither of us can break loose, we're stuck here for the rest of our lives. Or so it would seem. And the only question left ... is there any honor in this resignation? Will our heavenly father make it all right in the end? I'm sorry, but that don't work for me. Call it a weakness I guess.

Because here's the catch, the earthly dilemma: is there room at the top? For Rooster, for me, for any of us natural-born losers? I think it's something my father once said:

"In America *anyone* can become a millionaire (this was back when a million was a lot), but not *everyone* can be a millionaire - there just ain't enough money to go around." The logic of his wisdom was not lost on me, even though at the time I was only fourteen or fifteen.

There're a lot of people just like Rooster and me, stuck doing crappy jobs and never having a chance at a better life, no chance to ascend. Some people are born on home plate, and they're busy bragging how they hit a homerun. Rooster will never live uptown, never have a nice professional job,

and I'll never be anything better than a greasy mechanic. Maybe never is too strong a word, but in truth it's about the same odds as winning the mega-lottery – what are the chances really? You see, unless I miss my guess it's like this: America has ten losers for every big winner, or maybe it's a hundred losers, but whatever the case, in order for one of us losers to start having a winner's life, we got to pull one of them winners down to where we are. We got to swap lives, change places so to speak, or else we got to figure out how to recreate the whole culture and society in such a way that everyone gets to be a winner. But then that's not very Darwinian – not very American. What are the chances of that?

I remember when I was a kid, about eleven, twelve, or thirteen maybe. Me and Terry and Tommy and Cliff played Monopoly all summer long. We'd hole up in my dad's garage and battle it out for hours. We played by the rules for the most part, but we also made up rules to suit ourselves, to govern the fine points of the game. Sometimes we'd get into arguments over the rules, because of course they'd change to fit the circumstances, change to tip the balance of power. Tom and I were the smartest, so we could usually manipulate the rules in our favor, and if a dispute got out of hand, we had BB guns, and the Monopoly game would turn into a shootout. Seriously. We were tough kids. Ultimately I won most of the games, for two reasons:

First, I was clever at skewing the rules to my own advantage, and secondly, I was the most vicious when it came to the shootouts. In the game of Monopoly, I was a winner, but apparently the skills didn't carry over into real life.

Here's another recollection: one of my good friends is named Dexter, and he's Scots- Irish just like me, only he's a pure-blood, so to speak, and we went to high school together. He's a hell of a good guitar player and singer and he writes his own songs; he's also a construction worker – union carpenter – and he's good at what he does. Much like me, he's been around a while, and because he works in a labor union he can "boom out," as they say in the business, which means he can sign in at the local union hall in a different city and get sent out to work. So what he does, to make the real money, the overtime money, is head out to Las Vegas. In Vegas, where a lot of big motels and gambling casinos get built, the billion-dollar corporations are willing to shell out some heavy green because there's a shit-load of profit to be made. I mean, opening up a casino/motel is like drilling an oil well – once the strike is made, the money rolls in like a goddamned biblical flood.

My pal Dexter – actually we all call him Dex – has a friend, and his name is Steve, Mexican Steve among the good old boys because he's three-quarters Mexican. Dex and Steve like booming out together because they get along well and don't mind sharing a motel room when they're working. In Las Vegas, on a big job, there's lots of overtime and the overtime makes it possible to pay a weekly motel rate and still come out ahead. So that's what they do. Although what Dex told me about the last job they did in Vegas, was that they got stuck on a job with a real sonofabitch of a boss. He was one of those old-school bastards whose theory of labor management was based on fear, intimidation and constant bullying. The very thing unions were suppose to

protect against.

As an auto mechanic, I could have tried to get on a union job, but they were pretty scarce, only the fancy places like the Volvo dealership or BMW, and if you weren't related to somebody or hooked up, chances of getting in were slightly above piss-poor. But anyway, this boss – Kevin somebody – didn't realize that Steve was Mexican until Dex and him showed up on the job. So to punish Dex, who had done the talking to get him and Steve hired to begin with, boss Kevin put Dex on baseboard, the wood that goes along the bottom of a wall along the floor line. Dex is an older guy like me, and being on his hands and knees all day long wasn't easy, but he did what he had to do.

Meanwhile, Steve was put on another job and boss Kevin dogged him relentlessly, just looking for any reason to fire him. Dex and Steve had to bear it, because needless-to-say the union wouldn't intervene, even after Dex phoned the business agent and explained the situation. Eventually, he told Kevin to fuck himself and walked off the job; Steve hung with it because he had a wife and kids and couldn't afford not to work. Dex told me that the union was nothing but a hiring hall with benefits, and since the days of Reagan and his union-busting policies, working union didn't mean shit – the philosophy about a man being able to retain his dignity in the workplace was a distant memory. Nowadays it's down to sucking ass and playing by the rules – their rules, and their rules are pretty brutal.

All this aside, Rooster had a story about a job he was on before he got hired by the outfit I work for. It was another auto repair shop and Rooster was a new hire. His boss was born in Puerto Rico, named Mario, and you might think that one "Latino" would be decent to another Latino, seeing how they were both caught in the white man's game. But not according to Rooster. Mario treated him like some sort of second-rate human, always talking shit to him and making him feel like he was an idiot.

Rooster said to me, "Man, I could have gone off on a guy like that – I mean, hey, Jorge, he disrespected me every chance he had, and no matter what I did or tried to do, it wasn't good enough. It got to me, man"

I didn't know what to say, except to ask Rooster if Mario was light-skinned. He said, yeah, pretty much, and he had grayish-blue eyes. So I said, "Well, Rooster, unless I missed my guess, he's working real hard to prove to his white boss that he's just like him, you know, a man who knows how to ride herd on brown-skin motherfuckers."

Rooster gave me an odd look, as if he wasn't sure he was fully getting what I was saying; but then I think the light went on and he got exactly what I was saying. Rooster didn't know that I was part Native American, I'd never said anything about my background, but he looked closely into my eyes and said, "Jorge, you're not like other white men, you're straight-up in the way you treat people, people like me. You're a good man."

"Maybe I can relate better than you think," was all I said.

I was honored by what Rooster had said to me, and he grinned then and put an arm around my shoulder and jostled me and gave me a manly sort of hug. I thought about explaining my own family history, but then I decided not to. I didn't want to water down the moment. Because I really respected Rooster, and I understood his struggles, and despite the fact that I could pass under their radar didn't change that – the bottom line was pretty damned simple: Rooster was a good man in his own right, a little crazy and rough around the edges.

but then who wouldn't be? I mean, try it from the other side, when you're not sitting back in all your societal comfort and the fact that you're part of the pretty people, the ones for whom everything just falls into to place. That's right, get a good taste of what's it's like to be on the outside looking in, looking in your whole fucking life and never even having a hint of a chance of getting inside.

That's double right – all you fuckers who ride in all puffed up on your privilege and background, all you bastards born with your silver spoons and your tickets to the fancy universities where they'll teach you how to run the world, or if you're one of the really privileged, they'll teach you how to own it. But what have you really done? You just got born under the right stars, and the stars are out there in an empty void, and even if you assign meaning to those stars it doesn't mean they have any meaning at all – it's just a trick, like bullshit religion, like that pimp the Pope and every other pretender and liar who talks about pie in the sky – it's just another way to convince the slave that it's God's will that you're the master and he's the beast of burden. The bottom line is simple: one class does all the shit work while another class has all the good jobs and all the money.

Well, let me tell you what, people like me won't stay stupid forever. Eventually we'll all see through the fat big lie, and then ... well, think back on the French revolution, when the sharp edge of the guillotine was the solution, the best way to get the attention of the lords and masters and their kings.

So anyway... back to that containment thing, that Karmic bulldozer, that Caterpillar D-9 pushing me forward. How can I become something other than what the world of humans has decided that I should be? I dream about a hundred things that I could be, yet the world allows none of them, except the lowest. I'm a dumb-ass mechanic, a zero, a social and monetary nothing, and the world moves on without me. The world doesn't give a shit about me ... and I suppose, in my darker hours, I wonder if the world isn't right. Hey, I am a nobody, I am a zero, but there are other times when that's not how it seems to me, not in my interior world; and thus the conflict: me against the world. The world of "them," the ones for whom everything seems to go right – versus me, the one for whom nothing goes right.

I remember when I was a little kid, and Mom read me stories at bedtime, and one of the stories that stuck in my mind was the one about the emperor who had no clothes. Did you ever hear that story? Well ... if you did, fine, and if you didn't I won't bother telling the whole thing. The truth is, I think there's a whole boatload of people just like the emperor – they got nothing

on, just an illusion that everyone agrees to buy into. That's what I think about most of these so-called famous people, all the movie stars and TV personalities, the politicians. Paris Hiltons, Trumps, and all the other luminaries working-class people are taught to idolize.

But I say fuck 'em. Give every regular guy his fifteen minutes of fame and give all the famous ones fifteen months worth of hauling garbage or digging ditches or picking fruit. I want to see some of these privileged candy-ass bastards do what I do, or do what Rooster has to do, or Mexican Steve or Dexter. I want to read about some rich boys dying in coal mines or getting blown up on oil-drilling platforms, getting their asses shot full of lead in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Get out there and sweat and get blisters and broken backs and breathe hazardous dust and chemicals and die too young and every other fucking thing. Grab every sonofabitch at the Oscar Awards and put a pick and shovel in their lily hands and kick 'em in the ass, and if they can't hack it, throw the bastards under the bus. I know ... I'm getting carried away.

So ... Rooster and me are walking down the avenue and we see a couple corporate dandy dudes in their suits and ties, with their fancy eighty-thousand dollar cars and downtown seventh-story condominiums, and so we say hey motherfuckers we want to trade lives with you two pretty boys. Why don't you come and do our shitwork jobs for a while and we'll take your jobs. We get your BMWs and your Barbie Doll blonde trophy wives, your big credit cards and your golden parachutes, government bailouts and all that other good stuff.

One of them runs his fingers back through his hair, smoothing his seventy-five-dollar haircut. He glances at his buddy and they both give us looks and laugh and keep walking, like we're a couple dumb-ass jokers vying for their good humor. Rooster elbows me in the ribs and we exchange a look of our own ... because it's pretty damn clear, at least walking here on Park Place Avenue, that unless we pull out pistols and blow their fucking brains all over the sidewalk, there ain't no room at the top ... right?

By G. D. McFetridge



Street/wise

People walk by
All I see are their feet
The men
Cuffed black pants
A crease, down the leg
I imagine them in offices
Warm coffee
A window
That can see the city
People look small like ants
High-heeled shoes
Sometimes shiny
Often a bit scuffed
They walk quickly
Click click clicking past
Some, sheer stalking legs
The others
Pants pressed
I guess where they might be going
But never look past the knee
I am invisible
Sneakers, shiny white
Or caked with mud
Kids, I think
Big black boots
Sprinkled with white paint
These are the workers
And I used to be too
Steel-toed boots
Heavy, I recall
Chafed hands
Tired
Time passes
I know it's nearly dinner
When the same feet walk by
Slower now
Exhausted
Like mine
It becomes cold
Or warm rain
I'm hungry
Sometimes, the women
With the loud shoes
Pass me their lunches
Half eaten



While on their way home
Darkness summons
Different people
Angry and cold
Shelter
I once had it
I remember a warm bed
A night table
With books
My mother
She kissed my head
Now, dirt under my finger nails
Hair matted, now wet
My spot on the corner
Visualizing the bed
I wish she would come
Get me
Her son
After all
But its night-time now
She has no memory of me

At all

By Natalie Jeanne Champagne

After reading Marx

Cardboard; it's pretty much everywhere
though it may be a hike to find some.

After reading Marx
you're riding your bike home
the failed revolution of 1848
the one without brakes
you manage to stop at the light
anyway.

He stands there with his sign.

The black magic marker
is the part you wonder about
as you watch him leave his post
and go speak with his wife.

Because with so many screens
you don't just find a black magic
marker on the ground
not anywhere.

Is it the first thing one buys
with the pay you get
for confounding every belief system
on a street corner?

I suppose it would be easy enough to
examine one closely, as if you were deciding
on the best

quickly tear it from its package
with your black magic
confounding Moloch.

In the supermarket with your giant
empty backpack for the food
you're about to purchase

the employees, especially the ones
in the bread and liquor aisles
greet you especially warmly today.

They must have watched a video
on techniques to prevent shoplifting
what kids and the *lumpenproletariat* do
three pennies, adjusted for inflation.

In all fairness
they received the same wage
for watching this video
they will receive
for greeting you, treating you like a person
a member of the *lumpenproletariat*.

Or maybe you buy the marker
when you sense that things might be going really wrong
right after you've been expelled
like a spirit from its body.

Maybe you buy the marker and find the piece of cardboard
well in advance, premonitions
which come to you in perfect accuracy
because after all, everyone will be thrown out.

The next day there sits in your apartment
a square of cardboard
with one word only
no promises, no explanations
just HUNGRY bold and black.

It seems like a good idea for everyone
to prepare it in advance.

This is *not* an allegory of personal anguish.

By Alan Clinton

'17'

*hate is such a strong word to say
*but hate is all I have for yall everyday
*everyday yall affect my life
*i wonder if that's why I'm still not a wife
*maybe it all has to do with me
*maybe yall should have just let me be
*yall should have just left me alone
*all I do is walk thru life n moan
*only I keep it all inside
*if anyone knew what yall did I would just die
*die of embarrassment and would be ashamed
*i hate you all, yall have left me maimed
*yall left me bruised, beaten, n burned
*my life has completely turned
*turned into nothing but regret n fear
*it all started with just a little beer
*i took it too far n drank too much
*i hit the gas n took my foot off the clutch
*i went too fast, I could have crashed that nite
*i sometimes wish I did, bc that car was my life
*i drove my life down a horrible road that nite
*i let a so called friend take the wheel without a fight
*if I would've known shed steer me to yall
*i NEVER would have called her a friend, she let me fall
*she dropped me off n never looked back
*i went down without a fight n took ever whack
*i was completely blacked out
*yall took advantage of that no doubt

*all I have now is scars inside n out, mind, body, n soul
 *i wish I would've wrapped my car around a pole
 *at least it would have been done n over
 *i would never again wonder about my life
 *or if I would cut myself again with this knife
 *if I could do it all again
 *id never let her be my friend
 *a friend would never hurt me like that
 *a friend would have had my back
 *but yet again I'm stuck with these memories n fears
 *something that everyday brings me to tears
 *i wonder if ill ever have kids in my life
 *if ill ever make a good wife
 *if I could ever give birth n be pregnant with babies of my own
 *if ill have the life I want with children, a husband, and a home
 *i guess that's y I have dead-end relationships
 *bc deep down I know nothing sticks
 *no one wants a damaged good
 *honestly, who would....???

By Susan L. Wasner

Rabbit test

they look so happy and anticipatory, excited
 hold hands as the off-screen
 piss stick comes back
 "Oh, it's positive" and
 "I love you" it makes me

ache to remember
 being afraid to come home, knowing my boyfriend
 knowing his anger
 the knot in my stomach suddenly becoming
 something else
 wishing I

was part of that couple
 on tv
 still wishing I
 could get it that right

By Holly Day

Premonition

I was attracted to females from a very early age.
 Entranced and overwhelmed by their charms and their beauty.
 I was in kindergarten.
 Watching sleeping beauty in the school auditorium.
 My first girlfriend.
 Her name was Nikki.
 Was sitting next to me.
 She had flaxen hair with azure eyes.
 She wore pigtails and a pink dress that day.
 I reached over the armrest slyly and grasped her hand and held it.
 She looked over at me blushing and giggling.
 Feeling encouragement.
 I braced myself up on my seat and propelled my lips directly to hers.
 Giving her a big sloppy smooch.
 She was shocked and ecstatic.

The teacher seeing my action.
 Reacted quickly.
 Rushing over with a scowl on her face.
 Pointing. Scolding. Warning.

Nikki was looking so pretty sitting there.
 I could not help myself.
 Overtaken. Smitten.
 Right in front of the teacher.
 I repeated impulsively my unintentional offense.
 The teacher enraged.
 Slapped my hand.
 Banished me to the back of auditorium.
 Away from the other kids.
 Away from my dear Nikki.
 Sitting alone.
 Intuitively feeling the storm raging.

Unknowing at the time.
 An unpleasant foreshadowing.
 That incident was one of the first links in a long chain of troubles with the law,
 with schools, with women, with almost everyone and everything...

By Brian Shaver

Orphan Day at the science marina

No Rachel calls their names
as they state in wonder at the trapped fish,
the fish that hover in their home of eternal rain,
float like magical plums and pears
of heaven, in their prison,
unfurl their cavalry plumes
or descend in silken surrender,
swell to the size of medallions
or melt into ripples of light and melody,
fins silently whirring.

The children's voices treble the glass
as they watch these radiant coins
tossed here from another dimension,
trembling in phosphorescent recognition
of the lost, trapped behind the alcoholic stare
of the aquariums, the mystery of loss
sunk beneath the bones of the city.

It is their richness the children crave,
the way they swim in their wealth,
their bodies glimmering with the rainbow's unanswered question,
the way their gold and silver darts
carve the depth of memory,
their obsidian eyes keeping some secret
even from themselves.

And now, through the ultramarine shimmer,
other creatures appear, seeming to float in air,
silk suits and lavender gloves,
dutiful ties and careless, flowing dresses –
The Benefactors, wise guardians of the poor,
fresh from the honeyed trees of Lake Forest,
watch the circular emporium
stuffed with turtles, smoothed by rays,
watch the same old shark, same old shark, same old shark,
in his buried sea involved with revolving eyes.

Only the children and their abandoned fish
know the deep throbbing vacancy of hunger,
hunger for space, for light, for stars that remember,
for loving eternities cupped in the palm,
for anything real that can smash this kingdom
of glass and slavery,

so that the children, freed from pity,
might seek their lost mother's cries,
and the fish, freed from science,
beat their wings to the feathered skies.

By Sean Lause

If only alleys could talk

You're willing to
shed his blood
for whose lips
he chooses to
rest his on.
You're willing
to break his teeth
and spit in his
faggot mouth,
because of whose
waist
his hands are
wrapped around in
the morning.
You yell at him,
"I'm just doing god's work!"
I didn't know
god
was such a
violent man.
I guess his
face is good enough
for you to put
your foot
in.
I guess this alley
is ok for his
tears to
land
on.
You're doing the world
a favor
by taking away
his soul
in this alley
with only silent brick
and overflowing garbage

cans to see
what you are doing.
oh... and god of course
but, you're doing his work
so I guess
it's
justified.
If this is what you
have to do
to get into
heaven,
when does
the bus for hell
leave?
So I can buy
my ticket early.

By Evan Mallon

Across the tracks

On the east there were religious-cynics.
Prayers unanswered, illness was glooming
like an epic, black cloud of dust.
And these men, they scraped hope off the bread,
and carved into their walls "Jesus or bust"

Bar songs were their national anthems,
and when their happiness boomed,
it did so like a factory of hearts,
a million different thumps, still in their infancy.
Long, long, long away was any dream and doomed
was the travel at ever getting there,
when in their lowest pit
there was a soul waiting for the body to follow

On the west there were diamonds sewn into a frog's stone,
but it couldn't chip into a human heart,
it could only glow like a manmade sun.
Heels were higher, buildings were higher,
to throw a titanic shadow way over yonder across the tracks.
But the quest for fear sunk.
It desired for much and gained nothing.

Their faith in God was established
because God had served them well,
for look which way prosperity blew.
Those with gold can afford to believe.

By Amanda Tumminaro

This is for you

This is for the "thief" who steals to feed his family.
This is for the single parent working two jobs and getting kids to school.
This is for the beggar on the street with no money to his name.
This is for the woman on the sidewalk selling her body to survive.
This is for the pregnant girl with nowhere to turn.
This is for the boy in a gang learning the cruel nature of the world.
This is for the man selling drugs because it is all he knows.
This is for the child trying to make it out of the ghetto alive.
This is for the student called "stupid" who struggles in school.
This is for the rape victim trying to rebuild her life.
This is for the innocent man wrongfully locked in jail.
This is for the patriot who falsely believes he is free.
This is for the movie star who dares to question the system.
This is for the teenage girl who is worried she isn't "pretty" enough.
This is for the teenage boy who lies about having sex and doing drugs to fit in.
This is for the kid who gets bullied on the playground.
This is for the girl who hangs herself because of the cruel words of others.
This is for the child who plays video games all day because he is too afraid to
make friends.
This is for the youth whose minds are corrupted by Hollywood and the media.
This is for the girl who models because she thinks her body is all she has of
value.
This is for the child of divorced parents who will always struggle.
This is for the abused child who can never lead a normal life.
This is for the patient dying in a hospital from secondhand smoke.
This is for the victim killed in a drunk-driving accident.
This is for the drunk who can't quit the drink.
This is for the smoker who tries to quit but always goes back.
This is for the crackhead desperately craving the next high.
This is for the methhead who was robbed of his soul.
This is for the pothead sent to jail for years for possession of marijuana.
This is for the man who looks at porn all day but truly wants to find real love.
This is for you.

This is for the ones who are so afraid to die that they believe in a book.
This is for the ones who are terrified that this might be all there is.
This is for the ones who wake up each morning without any hope.
This is for the ones who want nothing more than to be loved.
This is for the ones living this life alone.
This is for the ones who wonder whether they want to continue living.
This is for the ones who have lost the light at the end of the tunnel.
This is for the ones pushed far beyond their breaking points.
This is for the ones who are waiting for a better tomorrow that never seems to
come.

This is for the ones who fear they are broken beyond repair.
This is for the ones who are afraid they will never find love again.
This is for the ones who suffer silently in the dark.
This is for the ones who are treated like less than human.
This is for the ones working in the sweat shops.
This is for the modern day slaves in the mines of Africa.
This is for the wage slaves running on the hamster wheel.
This is for the AIDS patients dying from an unnatural plague.
This is for the voices lost in translation.
This is for the cries drowning beneath the machine.
This is for the screams that no one ever hears.
This is for the tears that no one ever sees.
This is for the innocents killed that are never mentioned.
This is for the people that no one cares about.
This is for the dead in unmarked graves.
This is for the bodies that are never found.
This is for the victims in the wrong place at the wrong time.
This is for the people who are never heard from again.
This is for the missing children who will never be found.
This is for the broken families whose pain is beyond comprehension.
This is for the downtrodden, the impoverished, the ignored, the unheard and
the forgotten.
This is for you.

This is for the ones who dare to reject religion.
This is for the ones who dare to oppose the government.
This is for the ones who dodge the draft.
This is for the ones who will never join the military.
This is for the ones who are die-hard pacifists.
This is for the ones who do not vote.
This is for the ones who do not support the system.
This is for the ones who are called conspiracy theorists.
This is for the ones who seek the truth.
This is for the ones who think for themselves.
This is for the ones who know they are not free.
This is for the ones who are not unique like everyone else.
This is for the ones who realize not everything is their fault.
This is for the ones who cannot take it any more.
This is for the ones who refuse to take it any more.
This is for the ones who put their lives at risk by speaking out against inequity.
This is for the ones who can no longer relate to this world of violence and hate.
This is for the ones who feel like they are alone in their beliefs.
This is for the ones who want to change the world.
This is for the ones who imagine a better tomorrow.
This is for the ones who see hope where most people cannot.
This is for the ones who think outside of what is known.
This is for the ones who realize that there is much we do not understand.
This is for the ones who have their minds opened by wonder.

This is for the ones who understand that we are all one.
This is for the ones who see that everything that exists is connected.
This is for the ones who can feel that there is only one of us here.
This is for the ones dreaming of a better world.
This is for the ones who know that love really *is* all you need.
This is for the skeptics, the optimists, the lovers and the dreamers.
This is for you.

By Wes Scott

Atlas bluffed

Who is John Galt?

John Galt is a trust-fund baby. I know this, because I grew up with him.

In school, I remember his disdain for the pauperized, and how he frequently scoffed at the "societal parasites who receive free lunches."

"I provide for myself," he indignantly pronounced "I refuse to rely on the nanny state to pamper me."

He spoke of how they are suckling on the teat of government, as he unabashedly suckled the lactate from the *uchi-bukuro* teat of his opulent mother.

He received a weekly allowance of 200 dollars, and was the only kid in school with a brand-new car, but he never had to work for it. Seemingly unaware of his own hypocrisy, he jeered with enmity at the analogous prototypical welfare mother.

"These lazy free loaders don't want to work."

I remember how he pretended to be a "self made man" – at the age of just 18. But in reality, he was born into a golden cradle, and fed – by the live-in nanny – with 24k golden utensils.

Like the sanctimonious-closet-homosexual-priest, who condemns homosexuality, I remember how he incessantly projected his own ignominious lackadaisical disposition onto all of the destitute.

"They want handouts and wealth distribution so they can sit on their asses!"

"Socialists!"

"Communists!"

"Fascists!"

(Blah blah blah.... You've heard all the rhetoric and epithets before)

Decades later, after taking over the family construction business and becoming a self-proclaimed "entrepreneur," Mr. Galt became even more disgusted with egalitarianism and the welfare state.

Indeed, he did not inherit the family fortune just so he could be excessively taxed on his "hard-earned" riches.

And so he helped to foster "the tycoon rebellion," an uprising of the so-called "productive class." The revolt was supposedly composed of creators, philosophers, and inventors, but in actuality it was merely the fortunate sons, stock jobbers, wall street crooks, charlatan merchants, and real estate investors, who were all masquerading as the former.

"We are the backbone of society, and we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders, lower our taxes or else...."

But the revolution was fleeting, and it quickly became aware that this was simply group of well-to-do businessmen – who were pretending to be innovators like Henry Ford and Thomas Edison.

Galt himself was about as innovative and unique as his first name (and the *reductio ad Hitlerum* arguments he used), and it was just the same with all of the other adherents of the anti-collective-collective. They had not produced or created anything other than their rags-to-riches myth.

Contrary to the fallacy propagated by the affluent John (Oedipus) Galt and his true-believer disciples, the genuine creators were often the ones who were impecunious and languishing in obscurity – as no one understood their outlandish theories and propositions.

Using fear tactics, the Galt-cult hoped to scare the people into "voting more responsibly," which essentially meant protecting the interests of the plutocrats. If the people chose to not yield, and the suffrage of women, blacks, and the poor resulted in a desire for agrarian redistribution, then the indolent magnates would fulfill their promise to deliberately crash the economy.

Fortunately the nefarious scheme did not work. The people knew that the threat of "shutting off the motor of the world" was based on the false premise that the fat cats were the ones in possession of the key.

By Timothy Bearly

Not the 99%

For some it seeps far deeper than need.
It permeates far into the darkest caverns of greed.
They quite simply cannot fathom another's need
Nor do they care if you or I bleed.
They got theirs, so dammit,
Go get yours.
Never mind the fact they had many open doors.

By Paul Blumish

Remembering a city

The concrete
laughing at the
willows weeping --
the cracks
lips smiling at
bent boughs
bleeding
dew and
rain and
tears.

The clouds look
down
on the hungry masses,
counting their side
ways silver lines.

The cityscape betrays
the hips of Nature,
arms bound behind
her, legs spread
in the front.



By William Wright Harris

Heritage of hate

The Confederate flag
is the Cross of Saint
Andrews soiled, its
colors dyed in the
blood of slaves. The
stars barrels
bursting at brothers --
its stripes scars running
down a black man's back
and the winds that
lift it carry the
stench of the dead.

Sitting in Memphis
traffic, I see a
bumper sticker reading,
Heritage not Hate,
my mind spins
in out rage and
in vain.

By William Wright Harris

The origin of fascism

It's inventory day
at the schlockhouse.

The head of security
and his loyal assistants
are there to keep an eye
on the temps
who are armed
only with counters
strapped to their hips.

-- How's it going, chief?
asks one of the assistants.

-- It's going,
replies the temp.

-- There's donuts in the break room,
says the assistant.

As he walks away, the junior
detective says to his colleague
loud enough for all to hear:

-- You've got to keep them
sugared up so they can stay awake
and work.

By Lon Schneider

Holocaust in reverse

The Holocaust: a sad part of history, millions of lives lost.
Communists, Gypsies or anyone who didn't agree with their views,
But the primary victims were the Jews.
Rounded up late at night and in the light of day.
Because they were different they were gonna pay.
First some were tortured. I can't even imagine the pain,
Then hauled off packed in trains.
"Where are you taking us?" You know the answer was dreaded.
"You fucking Jew, the 'work camps' is where you're headed.
For once you will give to our society instead of taking.
Weapons for the war effort are what you'll be making."

When they were skin and bone and couldn't work any longer
They were thrown into gas chambers and replaced by those stronger.
They said it couldn't get any worse,
But what may be more perverse
Is what could be called a Holocaust in reverse.
History repeats itself is what they say.
In this case it's true and in the worst way.

Victims of the Holocaust: could these be their sons or young brothers?
Who would grow up to commit the same kind of crimes on others.
Those before them were forced to make weapons for the Nazi cause.
Later they would give them freely, not caring about the lives lost.

"Don't worry," the Israelis told Washington,
"We will help you cleanse your back yard.
We understand that the work
Of genocide can be difficult and hard."

Off to Central America to teach how to best torture and kill.
 "You cadets will go a long way if you do Mr. Reagan's will.
 And you, General Rios Montt, you do as we say,
 And I see you being president of Guatemala one day.
 And if you contras don't lose your stomach for mass slaughter in Nicaragua
 In no time we see you goose-stepping into Managua.
 And to you fellas: here's some of our sturdy Galil rifles.
 To kill the rabble, to kill the poor.
 We know you won't let them take over El Salvador.
 You must instill fear in the people, in their communities."
 This Israeli military man seems to blind to see the irony.
 "The only choice you have is to make them your slaves."
 Oh, how the Holocaust victims must be turning in their graves!
 And even as I write this down
 The Israeli army is gunning and bombing
 Their way through Palestinian towns,
 Killing women and children, you know it doesn't matter.
 The goal is to cause as many deaths as possible, make them scatter.
 "Self defense" is why Hitler said he slaughtered the Jews.
 Sharon says he murders Palestinians to fight terrorism.
 They would both say anything to defend fascism.
 Hitler called the Jews vermin.
 Sharon calls the Palestinians roaches.
 Will Sharon also kill himself if his day of reckoning approaches?
 His day of reckoning is something I would love to see,
 But it doesn't seem likely in this day and age
 When so many war criminals walk free.

By E. Maldonado
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The sadness of Zionism

So many Bible-story heroes
 now seem weak
 soldiers –

Joshua riding a bulldozer,
 Moses blocking a flotilla,
 David sling-shotting the last 11%
 of Goliath's land.

By William Meyer, Jr.

Pinochet's footsteps

The heat in the room
 is almost unbearable
 but you hear the tiny steps
 roaming upstairs.
 I am in a home of Chilean souls
 with a Swedish forest as
 a tainted backdrop.
 As a 17-year-old,
 Guido was shot at for his views.
 One bullet penetrated both doors
 of a car but he wasn't hit.
 A cruel Swede bestowed publicly
 that the Chileans living in Sweden today
 are the ones that Pinochet couldn't kill.
 At a rally in the town of Borlange,
 Guido started his speech with
 I am one of the dark ones
 that Pinochet couldn't kill.
 The crowd was appreciative
 and understood
 if briefly
 the slicing wounded words
 were prophetic.
 The footsteps of Pinochet are still here,
 as they were in the camp in Sweden
 awaiting the correct papers and partial welcome.
 In an attempt to distract
 the waiting,
 a band was formed.
 Angelic music with guttural drum-beats
 and a magical flute helped ease the pain
 of not knowing
 whether they would be forced to return
 to the blatant cruelty of Pinochet.
 5 of the band were forced home.
 The contact mysteriously stopped.
 September 11th, 1973.
 3000 dead and no one remembers in America.
 Why?
 Because America's blood runs across the Andes
 and pools in small Latin American villages.
 It clots the systems of thought
 with fabrication and glorification
 and then leaves small landmines
 for children to accidentally find.



This is Pinochet's ghost and dwelling.
He had his many years of lucid living in London.
The British Crown a clear coward
for wanting not to offend an ally.
But it is offensive.
It is the charred remains
of tortured civilians.
Electric shocks on genitalia
and small sticks under fingernails.
These are the footsteps that one hears,
between the darkest and most bleak
parts of night.
These footsteps a creaking reminder
of hysterical tears,
mothers asking for lost children
and the brutal sway of Pinochet's shadow.

By T. Anders Carson

Ltd. freedom

At the west lobby
The cameras, barbed wire fence
And security patrols
Reminds one of prison
Freedom limited to
Before 7 and after 3
Inside everyone dresses the same
T's and jeans move
With the assembly line
Through the dismal light of machines
Eat at the whistle,
Break at the whistle
Foremen guard each line
Pacify the whiners
Solitary for adversaries
Freedom at the whistle
All are one
Moving toward the cameras

By Robert W. Cohen

Americana

It's the grand opening
of the schlockhouse.

The founder is there,
the mayor, the chief of police
the fire marshal,
the local high school band.

Plenty of balloons
and banners flapping
in the December wind.

The manager tells the workers
there's no time to grab coats
the ceremony is starting.

So they huddle together
against the icy wind
in the parking lot
while the dignitaries
spout the usual platitudes:

"... a great asset to the community"

A month later
half the workers are laid off.

They were only hired
to open the store
in time for the holiday season.

By Lon Schneider

The machine

Black Elk came out of the mountains
For the first time
He left his village and people behind
He headed down to the valley

To the city of light
To see what he might find

He came upon great confusion
People with blank eyes
People doing a strange dance
Expressing nothingness and lies
They were dulled and dreamlessly trapped
In a bubble of isolation
Without minds

And the machine was everywhere
Long tentacles reaching all around
Grabbing everything and everyone in its path
Ripping their souls out
Placing each of them in predetermined complacency

The herd shuffles along dirty streets
There was no one to meet
No one to greet
All in bubbles and shuffles
Faces flash behind windows of glass
From cars cabs and buses
Blank eyes
All of them with those blank eyes
And the machine was everywhere
The machine was everywhere

By John "JD" Dunfee

Hear ye!

We thank you
for all the cookies you baked for us
over the years, and the jokes that started our day
with a smile. However,
we have made some crucial changes behind your back.

We, in Management, have all gone on diets.
We have replaced you with Betty Crocker, Aunt Jemima,
and Jeff Foxworthy.
Your services, cookies, and jokes are no longer needed
and will not be appreciated or tolerated.

Your company 10 badge is no longer valid.

It will no longer get you through the door.
Our galaxy no longer includes you.
By the way, since we haven't worked you for weeks now,
you owe the company hundreds of dollars
for the Health/Dental Insurance benefits
you have taken advantage of.

We are feeling robbed,
and, knowing you,
know that you wouldn't want us to feel this way.
We trust you to rectify your predicament immediately
upon receipt of this notice.
Have a nice day!

By Judith L. Lundin

My name

My name was brought before you and
you got out your shovel
(and your Company pen and Termination Papers).
You took my name off the employee list and
proceeded to dig my grave while I continued to report
to work dressed in uniform "just in case"
there was work for me.

Not long ago, you had given me a raise and written,
"Judith is honest, trustworthy, and dependable."
I was faithfully yours.

Each day i was the first blue-collar employee
to enter the building... 6:29 A.M. even when
I was not scheduled. I maintained perfect attendance.

We saw each other every morning
and you never said a word to me about what was going on.
And you never said "Good Morning" to me
like you did to my co-workers.
All you ever did was glare at me and say,
"I have nothing for YOU."
You lied, because you did: TERMINATION.

Good Friday (just a month before the annual
All Employee Appreciation Week, and barbeque)
I went to the post office to pick up a certified letter
from the company -- the one and only piece of mail

ever received from the company in the almost six years
I was an employee there. The letter stated my Health/Dental Benefits
were only going to be good through 4-30-07.

Reason for Loss of Coverage:

TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT.

Did the Truth of what you were doing
hurt so much that you couldn't face me
that if you did,
you'd be the one walking away in tears?

By Judith L Lundin

Cutthroats

Management --

Heavy breathing cutthroats

trying to spin straw into gold

as they fire faithful employees

for no reason
right and left

soon there will be no one left

But themselves

to move heavy furniture

up and down stairs

and onto company trucks

that are running out of gas and drivers.

Management --

Deadly lightning

striking employees

off the employee list

knowing employees can not strike back

because there is no Union.

And it takes money to hire a lawyer and sue.

Management thinks they are safe

like money in the bank --

that they can't be robbed

even of their reputation because

they are Management.

Management wipes their hands clean

Of all employees they get rid of...

not realizing that if a former employee

commits suicide

clearly for no other reason than "Termination
Of Employment,"

That their hands will be bloodstained forever
And they will have no last breath left to take.

By Judith Lundin

This land was never ours

With our spotted faces, needled arms,

sacks over our backs, runaways, and cases of the state,

welfare mothers, soup kitchen tenants, battered women,

sold women, slain souls, gays, darkened skin, the poor.

Disregard our souls, we walk in the gutters,

we are stalked by our shadows, no water from the sky,

no milk from cows, no opened doors,

no houses lit at night, no future, only here and now, no faith,

no belief from others, no belief in others,

no reason for reason, no tender lovers, no money, no work.

We've tread along the fields,

they were stained by the sun's rays, those who walked before us.

We go unseen, we pass like a mirage.

We've walked this land, from home and back,

a collage of misfits, human transportation.

We borrowed, we were lent and loaned

and we were left alone in the midst of this populous nation.

Christ may look over us, Christ may protect us,

but Christ knows this land was never ours.

It was never ours to keep, it was never a sacred jewel,

never a cradled baby, never a furnace in the cold.

We've only restless, panicked sleep.

No, this land was never ours.

By Amanda Tumminaro

The poor boy

He arrived undersized
Immediately they institutionalized
Compartmentalized
Brutalized and Propagandized
The poor boy
Individualized traits
Collateralized and finalized
He was criticized demoralized and desensitized
Till he was perfectly socialized

That beautiful free-flowing spirit
Demonized
Then he realized
He was still undersized
Praying he wouldn't be euthanized

By John "JD" Dunfee

Babylon

I live in Babylon full of hate
They worship money and the state
The priests wear titles very bold
And want to be on top before getting old
They lie, cheat, steal, stab in the back
Wanting to believe there is nothing they lack

Heartless, cold, mean and cruel
They live the life of a fool
Not caring who they hurt or oppress
Babylon, Babylon, the world is a mess

In Babylon they take more than they give
The priest grabs everything, it is why they live
They care not for the worker nor for the poor
Soldiers by the millions suffer in war

Ah Babylon you shall fall in an hour
We will crush your head and steal your power
Red is the flood of the fire that will arise
Blood in our bellies and hope in our eyes



I sing in Babylon a song of lament
I sing the dirges each time I pay the rent
Babylon, Babylon I long for you to die
And in that hour hear my victory cry

By John Kaniecki

The Coming of Christ

Carved in marble, etched in granite,
Rich tapestry cut from the same cloth --
Nicknames notwithstanding, their name
Is legion:
The Father of His Country, The Sage of Monticello,
The Great Emancipator, The Great Communicator,
The Trust Buster, Old Hickory, Old Rough and Ready,
Mister Missouri, Bubba, The Little Magician, Slick Willie,
Tricky Dick, Dubya – Lynchin' Bains Johnson resonated
Deepest... until...

Jesus Christ came back
Not as a *organizer*
Of Sleeping Car Porters, rejecting *George...*
Not as a *Socialist*
Speaking truth to lunch-bucket crowds...

Not as a pistol-packing *terrorist*
Pointing her people at the North Star...
Not as a bearded, old, white *extremist*,
Uncomfortable with slavery...

Not as a *Muslim* minister spitting fire
At mass murderers, posing as victims...
Not as a *Baptist* preacher pinning the
Emperor's clothes on fine lines of love...

Jesus Christ came back
From a manger on Madison Avenue,
Singing slogans and selling snake oil
Labeled "Hope" from the back of the
Wizard's wagon – good Chicago shit
Lincoln, Jesse, Oprah and other orators
Have hooked hope-fiends on for hundreds of years...

Jesus Christ came back
Temptation-walking the Potomac
To "Beauty's Only Skin Deep"
And calibrating his cover story:
Rosa sat, so
Martin could stand, so

The State Machine could run –
Amok with *seamless* precision.

Jesus Christ came back
Forgiving thieves and murderers
Escaping Calvary with gold,
Aboard Pontius Pilate's heli-
Copter and Ol' Satan's wheelchair.
Came back overturning tables in
The temple and throwing money-
Changers out, with trillions of dollars;
Came back teaching men to fish
For TARP, multiplying like loaves...

Jesus Christ came back
Crowned *Prince of Peace*,
Though he bore billions for
Shepherds beating swords into
Stock shares, came with his
Eye on the sparrow, and hand on the
Drone, came sending Christian soldiers
Spreading the gospel of *Empire*, insuring
That the meek shall inherit the earth --
Of mass graves, he so piously blesses...

Jesus Christ came back
Blowing smoke about clean coal and nukes
While hurling his Green Czar under Grey-
Hound tires and recycling disciples from
Regimes past, since "A rising tide lifts all boats"
Except those of *pirates* and *terrorists*,
Who fish and farm, *when left alone*...

Jesus Christ came back
With jump shot, crossover and slick behind-the-
Back ball-handling skills for bitch-slapping Black
Caucus, liberal-labor apostles who stood on ice,
Crying freeze-dried tears on his warhead and
Singing obscene songs about "Bombs bursting
In air/ and rockets' red glare," as he taunted
And tamed them in tongues:
*"Tamp down your expectations, for there are
No Negroes, youngstas, or old fools 'too big to
Fail' – now, get out there and get my money!"*

Jesus Christ
Came back as a professor impersonating Iceberg Slim,
Though his flock swore they'd "*hold his feet to the fire* --"
Is that why his combat boots have lipstick on them?

Travels among the Americans

*The Author visits the Americans -- His hints of their philosophy of the Fanciful --
His Conclusions thereof.*

Of all my journeys and travels, no place discomfited me more nor imposed greater anxiety on me than my stay amongst the people called the Americans. This is not to impugn the ease with which I was conveyed or the rapidity of transport to and from their country (which most Americans have a great desire to complain about) nor to insult the great hospitality to which I was treated. Moreover, I do not deny having ever experienced a society more prodigious, creative, intellectual, superior in all the arts and sciences.

But I found it disbalancing to be amongst a people whose underlying philosophical principle I was never quite able to understand and then, when I arrived at such, found it mentally abnormal to practice.

They have no name for this philosophy though practice of it permeates the entire people. So prevalent is it that I believe it is not impossible for them to be not only unaware of its permeation but even unaware of their practicing it. I shall call this philosophy the Fanciful since it seems most accurate a description of it.

My first inkling of the practice came about by my exposure to a custom of watching a mechanical device called "television." A television is a box ranging in sizes that cover a whole wall or small enough to be held like a compact. Nearly every household possesses at the very least one, if not one in each room. Do not think that this is a practice common only among the wealthy! Oh, no! For so great a disgrace is it not to be in the practice of watching television that the poor will go without food or clothes or payment of bills in order to procure televisions to watch.

This box produces visual images upon a flat surface or screen. Nothing more can describe it than to say it is like watching a play through a window. Numerous plays of both Tragedy and Comedy are shown throughout the day and night, the viewers having especial favorites and taking the greatest of pains to be able to watch them. Often, I saw viewers experience a terrible anxiety as if Judgment had come upon them when they were not able to watch the particular play they deemed important. To accommodate and avoid such trauma, televisions are found in taverns, inns, laundries, health clubs, schools -- any place a person may transact business or hold discourse.

Given the all-consuming importance of television, I thought at first, it must be their religion, the programs producing a sort of catharsis in the tradition of the Greek and Roman theater. For assuredly, though everyone was aware that

the stories weren't true and that actors did the performances, the "shows," as they were called, took on a life of their own. In conversing about their favorite shows, a person's whole manner of address would be involved, as engaged, as if not more so, than when one discussed one's own family!

However, after years of viewing religiously, no catharsis or satori seems to be produced -- the viewer does not become more enlightened, virtuous, repentant, holy, compassionate or emotionally stable. There was absolutely no effect at all! Even the Americans, themselves, emphatically denied television watching was their form of spirituality.

But their religion played the same curious tricks as well. I happened to be entertained by an Orthodox priest who conducted an elaborate service in a temple lavishly decorated and highly ornate. His sermon dealt with our attitude towards the marginalized, in particular the homeless. So stirring were his words, so full of humanitarian conviction, I was surprised that at the end of the service the congregants did not open the church doors and gather in all the unfortunate souls and bring them in (the church being able to house quite a good number given its size). Moreover, when the priest gave me repast at his residence, I found it to be in a fairly exclusive area, abounding in large rooms of very high quality furniture with a grand piano near the window that gave a marvelous view of the lawn. He showed me around the house with great delight and pleasure and I was curious as to how many homeless people he had taken in. Later, I was to discover that not a single lost soul had ever lodged under his roof.

Again, upon visiting a Baptist minister who had less of the elaboration and sophistication as the Orthodox priest, I noticed the same kind of Fanciful. Here, as previous, a morning service although considerably less decorative, the pastor delivered a heartfelt sermon on forgiveness that would have wrung tears from the eyes of the most hardened case. He emboldened the congregation to "never give up on a relationship but always start over, from square one, if need be" and that this was the message of Jesus. I was startled to hear such words since the other day at tea he confessed that two members had to be kicked out and enumerated the reasons why no one from the congregation could be in a relationship with them.

I began to see this was not hypocrisy but a specifically American functioning. The Americans do not have much concern for the Real but live as if the Fanciful were true. Therefore, although television is the real religion of the Americans, no American would make that claim because in fact it is the reality. It was the Fanciful that Americans will always opt to believe (although they would be insulted if you said that to them). Therefore, in dealing with Americans it is important to bear in mind that they never say what they really mean.

These conclusions were confirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt by a propitious event I was privy to witness. I had ventured into their country during an election year and was given a first-hand view of the workings of their political system and how this idea of the Fanciful plays a heavy role in

government.

Government consists of two parties, Democrat and Republican, both claiming vast differences of philosophy and practice but I was not ever able to discern any discrepancies. Each party chooses a candidate to run for the Presidency, the office which rules the land. The party chooses a complete Buffoon who despite being graced with good education and good family is still a complete Buffoon. It is quite obvious that the candidate is a Buffoon from the speeches they give and the debates they engage in. Yet, each party stands behind their Buffoon and launches extremely expensive campaigns to convince people their Buffoon isn't a Buffoon or at least isn't as big a Buffoon as the one from the opposing party.

The Americans claim they choose their ruler by free election in which every vote counts, although through a process called the electoral college, a vote from Connecticut doesn't count as much as one from Florida. And thus by tallies of the most important votes of the electoral college, a particular Buffoon becomes ruler and the people act as if they selected him.

I came upon, quite accidentally, an institution called a "Mental Health Facility" I was informed that these facilities function in such a way as to give those individuals who have "problems coping with reality" the much-needed help they require. I did not learn much about them but I did find out that several require a "patient" to stay for long periods of time and live under conditions similar to incarceration. I do know that these facilities are equipped with televisions. I am led to conjecture, although I possess no real evidence, that these are places for political dissidents and heretics who have questioned, challenged or in other ways gone against the dictates of the Fanciful. I believe this since nearly all patients are given medicinal drugs which render them docile enough for nothing more than television viewing.

I did not stay long amongst the Americans and was relieved to leave as soon as I did, for I had an intuition that longer periods of visitation would send me to a Mental Health Facility or unbalance me so that I would not be able to view the world objectively again.

By Mark Fitzpatrick

*The author's friend continues his Observations – Wealth extreme breeds Resistance –
The strange Practice of Amerikkkan Elections*

Not long after successfully making his escape from the embrace of the Americans, Mark Fitzpatrick penned the above account of his experiences among that people. It is quite understandable that Mr. Fitzpatrick described his adventures there as being endured by himself alone, since I, his good friend Timothy, at that time remained in that curious land, and David rightfully feared for my safety should he mention my presence in his rather critical account, the Americans being known to hold their country the best in the world and to react angrily, at times even with violence, to anyone possessing the temerity to call

this irrational belief into question. But having made my own escape from America, I am now able to relate the remaining scope of the adventures of Mark and myself.

Here I must advise the reader that the oddities we encountered there were largely created, or indirectly incited, by the wealthy ruling classes. The common people showed remarkable concern for our well-being. They made sure we had a roof over our heads, beds to sleep in, hot meals and protection against harassment or robbery by criminals. Many of these Americans, when questioned by us about some barbaric American custom, waxed angry at the perpetrators and excoriated them as "rich bastards" and other colorful terms, even when the term "bastard" could not be logically applied, the individuals in question being known to possess legitimate parents. Some Americans, possessing darker skins and tracing their ancestors to slavery and to the continent of Africa, even ventured to brand the authorities as "pigs." This puzzled us at first, for pigs are very intelligent animals and of cleanly habits when provided with a hygienic environment. But we learned that heretofore the pig has been bred and raised in filthy environments in that county, resulting in the use of the epithet "pig" as an extreme pejorative. Upon discussion of these conditions with these African Americans we came to agree that reference of oppressive authorities as "pigs" was, in turn, a regrettable slander of the porcine species, but the use of this nomenclature understandably continued to satisfied the anger of the oppressed and hence they continued to employ it.

During our stay in this strange country Mark and I had occasion to puzzle over the oddness of the country's very name, "America." We observed that the elementary schoolrooms sported globes like those we had ourselves studied in school, clearly showing the existence of a North, a South, and a Central America, containing a total of 35 independent nations. We therefore found it strange that only one of these, the United States, would have the temerity to style itself "America," in an apparent denial of the right to that name to all the others. However, when we inquired about this, "Americans" evidenced a degree of bewilderment at the question that induced us finally to abandon any attempt at clarification. Our inquiries were inevitably answered, "Well, we are Americans. Those others are Mexicans," or "Those are Brazilians, Chileans," etc. Encountering such ill-ease, we refrained from mentioning a wall slogan we encountered in southwest Detroit, which we rather enjoyed: "When they call themselves Americans, they only reveal their appetite."

We observed another strange peculiarity, that some African Americans write the name "America" with one "k," or even with three "k"'s, in it, as in "Amerika" or "Amerikkka." We inquired of the reason for this practice and were informed that America had not yet discarded the practices and ideology of an organization called the Ku Klux Klan. Our informant, agitated, declared that "those motherfuckers enslaved us, raped and murdered and lynched us and will do the same thing today if we give them half a chance!" We were duly impressed by the vehemence and determination with which he expressed this sentiment.

Amerikans, we observed, are closely attached to their belief in "the

Fanciful." Their science has concocted a form of energy so volatile that its authors neither reliably control it, nor can they effectively dispose of its waste, nor create it cheaply. Its prime result is high profits for the financiers. This energy is called "nuclear" and it emits an invisible force which they call "radiation," which cannot be seen but which can kill immense numbers of people, either instantly or over long periods of time. This invisible force invades ordinary substances, such as dust, earth, rock, tree leaves, fruits and vegetables, whereupon it can reside for as long as hundreds of thousands of years while remaining deadly. The factories, called "reactors," wherein this energy is created are built in vulnerable places such as the seaside subject to tsunamis, next to huge rivers prone to flooding and over terrestrial faults that spawn earthquakes. Weapons employing this energy were twice exploded by the Amerikans upon a people attempting to surrender to them in war, and the results were horrifying in loss of life and limb. Twice major "reactors" in other countries have melted in their own heat, emitting much radiation into the environment. Yet Amerikan leaders extoll these energy plants, which daily leak smaller amounts of their poison, as "safe" and "economical" sources of energy. So strong is this belief in "the Fanciful" that I can only conclude that Amerikans are suicidal and I fear that the rest of the world will follow their folly.

This fear of mine increased as I observed changes taking place in the climate. Scientists observe that the world climate is growing warmer. Glaciers and ice caps are melting; soon the North Pole will be open for shipping in the summer. Animals, plant and insect species are moving their ranges north, where they can, to remain in their zones of survival. A great hue and cry has arisen from the world's scientists, warning of the consequences of this warming in extinction of species, great droughts, wild and dangerous weather and the flooding of low-lying cities and countries by the rising seas. Numerous studies show this warming to be a product of the release of copious quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by Amerikan and world transportation and industry. One would think that, once warned, the governments of Amerika and the world would take stern measures against such carbon emissions. But "the fanciful" must not be underestimated. Many Amerikans disbelieve that the climate is warming and that the cause is human, even as disastrous droughts have reached from Georgia to Texas, huge cyclones have devastated small cities and wildfires have raged through dry brush and timber. At world conferences, the Amerikan representatives have been most lackadaisical. They lead all others in opposition to stern regulatory measures. Instead, they create laughable schemes called "cap and trade" whereby they deceive the masses into believing that the rich industrial polluters will fight pollution and make a neat profit doing so. Such is the power of "the Fanciful" in Amerika, a power which, regrettably, has spread throughout the world.

After Mark had departed from Amerikka, but before I had been able to make my own departure, some unusual events occurred which I am certain will provoke interest in our readers. It is well-known to our readers, all of whom reside in countries where the capitalist mode of production is prevalent, that said productive relations result in possession of the majority of the wealth of the country by a mere handful of people, who do no work whatsoever, paying a

stratum of brainwashed servants to administer the wealth, govern the country and beat down any serious protest by the poor, while the immense majority of the population either toils for this handful, bossed by the administrators, or fails to find work at all and lives a hand-to-mouth existence.

But while this structure is common to all capitalistic nations, in Amerikka it is carried to a degree that can only be described as insanity, where a mere 1% owns 42%, and probably more, of those riches. Six members of a family named Walton own as much wealth as 30% of the remaining population. When Mark and I inquired how such a small part of the population could attain such wealth without laboring at all, we were answered, "anyone can get rich if he works hard enough" and "in America anything is possible." We desired to know the actual method of going from poverty to incredible riches without working, or even by working, but we received only such responses as "you have to be smart," "you gotta be at the right place at the right time." Our informants, being unable to reveal to us said place and time, evidently did not know.

I recall my friend becoming inflamed by this state of affairs and severally exclaiming, "surely the common people will arise to fight back!" Yet he was received with derisive laughter or resigned despair. But when not long after, in September, Mark was able to make his escape from Amerika, a very strange thing occurred. A group of young Amerikkans, many rendered desperate and outraged by unemployment or threats to their jobs, began to "occupy" a park near Wall Street, which is a series of buildings within which agents of the very wealthy carry on gambling operations aimed at augmenting the incomes of the rich, whose incomes, one would think, have no need of augmentation. It was not clear what effect "occupying" this park would have, as it had been used for numerous protests before, but the young people, in a stroke of genius, declared they were "the 99%" attacking "the 1%" for their ill-gotten wealth.

Those who do not share the weal and woe of the downtrodden masses oftentimes misread indications when the situation has suddenly turned precarious. Thus with the 1%, who did not reckon with the mood of the people and dispatched mercenary police to suppress the protests with naked force. But the Occupiers are flammable material; they stood their ground, multiplied their number by methods of rapid communication, and strengthened their determination. The resulting conflict spread like a fire on the American prairie, to over 300 locations, across nearly the entire globe. The daring movement of the "occupiers" has revived the open class struggle of the laborers and the poor in Amerikka. Six months ago "class warfare" was only spoken of by a small number of activists; today the whole country sees it on the agenda.

But the road to victory for this movement is long and rocky, as the ruling powers confirmed in ensuing months. Once the first police offensive failed, the agents of the wealthy who hold positions as mayors of the major cities feigned support and sympathy for the occupiers, wooing them with honeyed words. But soon they revealed the mailed fist hidden behind the honey. Amerikkans like to call Amerikka a democratic country; one of their two principal political parties bears the name "Democratic," but it was the mayors of this party, in coordination with the federal government also headed by a Democrat, who

sent their police to destroy the Occupy encampments. Belief in the "democracy" of the American system, and of the Democratic Party, mayors and President, is another incidence of "the Fanciful" cited by Mark above, an instance of "belief in what is not," as the Hounyhnhnms, the relatively egalitarian horses of *Gulliver's Travels*, describe it. It is, indeed, "the Fanciful" for Amerikkans to continue belief that they possess the right to assembly, speech and petition, when the crushing of those who call for more democracy is carried out by those who describe themselves as the guardians of democracy, a "democratic" action "justified" on the humble grounds of hygiene. After all, if the problem of the Occupy sites was litter, why not send cleaners instead of police? That would evidently be too democratic!

Confronted with the perplexing question, "how much democracy can a democracy stand?" the Democrats of Amerikka boldly replied, "not much!" The Occupiers replied to their bludgeoners with mass marches, appealing to the west coast workers and closing several West Coast shipping ports, one of them twice. As if to scorn these young rebels, the "Democratic" President, a black man elected in 2008 by the enthusiasm of the same young people he was now suppressing, sent a bill through the Congress codifying into law the practice of his hated predecessor, of preventative, indefinite detention and even assassination of citizens of this reputedly democratic republic. The bill also expanded the scope of the targets of this policy to include not only terrorist religious fanatics but also undefined oppositional forces, bringing rebelling workers and the Occupy movement into its sights. The protestors for greater democracy are "rewarded" with the destruction of habeas corpus, allowing them to be held indefinitely without trial! Thus did the "Democrats" thus reward the actual democrats. At the same time the labor traitors who lead the unions, seeing their privileged positions as "leaders" of the workers threatened by the potential coalescence of some of their rank and file with the section of Occupiers most sympathetic – the poorer and casualized workers active in the movement – have also begun to attack the Occupy movement.

How could a Democratic President crush the most active element of his base and yet expect to get re-elected in the Presidential election approaching in the fall of 2012? The answer lies in the spectacle of the opposing party's public process of selection of its candidate to oppose the "Democrat." This concurrent process involves a series of public debates and local votes by candidates apparently selected for the most anti-democratic and anti-working-class views in the entire country. These "debates," if they may be charitably so called, are broadcast to the nation by television. They have provided a clown show of imbecility seldom witnessed since the demise of the comics The Three Stooges and Laurel and Hardy. The Republican clowns, as I am confident to call them, have revealed themselves as a coterie of adulterers, sexual harassers, racists, advocates of child labor, opponents of any judicial process whatsoever, homophobes and sufferers of premature dementia.

Such a clown show has relieved the Democratic President of any fear of offending the oppressed and the youth, as he knows they cannot possibly vote for any of these cretins. Within the present electoral system the oppressed

remain bound to him, to their open betrayer. They must forget that he has marched in such a lock-step with his hated Republican predecessor that he may be called "Obush." In lock-step he showered the bankers with so many trillions of the workers' tax money, while giving nothing to the foreclosed-mortgage sufferers, that he may be called "Obanka." That he so carried on the Bush war tradition that he earned the sobriquet "Obomba." That the oppressed, entirely deprived of any rights, must hold their nose and vote for their Judas, their Nemesis, kiss the boot that crushes them. That both parties are merely boots of the same body, Iron Heels of Capital.

Unless.... Unless....

Unless the Occupiers, the activists, the workers, the anti-nuclear people, the immigrants, the environmentalists, can band together and find another path. The electoral process offers them no avenue to serious change. Expanded war looms. Economic, nuclear and environmental crises deepen. But May 1st is coming soon – the traditional day of workers' uprising throughout the world, begun in the U.S. but neglected of late due to the opportunism of the labor leaders. In 2006 the immigrant workers flooded the streets on that day; more recently activists have begun reviving the tradition. If these forces can rally on May 1st and raise the broad banner of working-class struggle against the rich, the banner that so many of their forefathers and mothers have fought and died for, then a new path may open for struggle against the anti-democratic lock-step elections of 2012, a new path to justice for the poor and the oppressed!

By Timothy Yahoouyhnms



Editorial Policy

Struggle is an anti-establishment, revolutionary literary journal oriented to the working-class struggle. We seek to reach "disgruntled" workers, dissatisfied youth and all the oppressed and abused and inspire them to fight the rich capitalist rulers of the U.S. and the planet. We stand for the working class to overthrow the capitalists in a proletarian revolution, smash their state machinery and establish a workers' government which would build genuine socialism with a policy of democracy for the masses, suppression for the bosses. While this is our goal, we support all struggles against exploitation and oppression.

The capitalists and their mass media, publishing industry and educational system suppress rebellious and pro-working class literature and art. Instead they flood our minds with militarism, racism, mysticism, dollar-worship, anti-woman and anti-gay brutality, anti-foreigner hysteria, empty sentimentality and religious platitudes. The healthy literature of working-class rebellion finds few outlets -- in political newspapers, at demonstrations, in leaflets, in underground zines, in performances at meet.ing and art. *Struggle* is distributed mainly among the working class.

Struggle is open to a variety of artistic and literary forms and anti-establishment political and cultural views. We look for works with artistic power which rebel against some element of the capitalist power structure or against the system itself. We look for works which depict the working-class struggle and advocate the proletarian revolution, but at the same time we print many varied works that are hostile in different ways to the ruling elite. We look for writings which condemn the two political parties of the rich, as well as the sellout union leaders and bourgeois misleaders of minority communities and women. We will not print racist, sexist, national chauvinist or homophobic material.

Struggle believes in the initiative of the oppressed themselves and opposes the bureaucratism that turned the Soviet workers' government away from the socialist path in the early 1920's, as well as the complete revision of Marxist theory, by Soviet and other false "communists," into a justification of reformism and state-capitalism. Until November 1993, *Struggle* was published by the Detroit branch of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA, and the party gave great creative, political and material support to the magazine. But at the organization's fifth congress, a majority, discouraged by the lull in the mass movements, voted to disband the party without proposing any worked-out revolutionary alternative. A minority opposed this collapse. Today a grouping of revolutionaries continues to develop anti-revisionist communism in the MLP's spirit. They are united in the Communist Voice Organization, which produces the *Communist Voice* theoretical journal. *Struggle* is associated with this trend. We will continue, but we need greater readers' input, donations, subscriptions and help in distribution.

Struggle's editor is Tim Hall, an activist and Marxist-Leninist since the 1960's. *Struggle* is a non-profit magazine, produced and distributed by the voluntary labor of a very few people. It pays its contributors in copies. Subscription rates are \$2 per single-size issue (\$3 by mail), \$10 for a subscription of four, \$12 for four for institutions, \$15 for four overseas, \$5 for prisoners.

Struggle welcomes poems, songs, short stories, short plays, line drawings and cartoons. Manuscripts will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We try to critique everything. If you do not wish to be published on our upcoming web site, please say so. Bulk discounts and back issues are available. Checks or money orders must be made payable to Tim Hall -- Special Account. *Struggle* can be reached at PO Box 28536, Detroit, MI USA 48228 or at tmhall11@yahoo.com. Web site: www.StruggleMagazine.net.

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