



Photo by Barcelona

## Ghetto Reflections

Short Story by Henry Pankey

Sweat keeps rolling down my face causing it to shine. My pulse and heartbeat increase as if they are racing for life. A knot twists in my stomach giving me the oozy-feeling one gets when one is about to vomit but nothing comes up. My hands constantly shake as if I am in a deep freeze. I know I am not about to freeze in this 90 degree cell. As I think of my reason for being in this pig pen, I decided to write this manuscript so that America and all the world can see my ghetto reflections that contributed to the making of a criminal. I do pray this story will be published but I know I'll never live to see it go to press. Let me also say I did shoot these two white policemen. Oh, everybody thought it was a-shame. Me, Bob-shooting two cops. Well I am glad I shot these "mothers", and if I could get my hands on a gun I would clean out this pig-pen. To be honest with you, there was a time when I would not have harmed any fellow human being. Maybe after you read some of the events that happened during the course of my life you'll understand why I have lost faith in the so-called Great American Dream, thus I'll proceed.

I hate to even think of the tworoom apartment my mother, father, and I shared. My Dad would always come home drinking or drunk except when he got drunk at home. He would always beat Ma and hit me, cursing, kick me and tell me how crazy I was. He always reminded me how he hated I was his son. I still loved him for a long time. Soon it was impossible for me to love him. I tried though, I tried real hard.

You can't force love or hate. You can fight either or both of them, but emotions are much stronger than the mind. I still pulled him out of the rain, on cold nights when he collapsed on the sidewalk, steps and sometimes even in the streets. I would fight anybody that said anything bad about him to my face. Sure, I know kids talked about him behind my back. I know he had tried to get a job but he wasn't educated. Dad was raised down south and he worked on the farm for some white man that was supposed to have liked Black People. I don't see how because he used to pay Dad three dollars a day for slave labor. It took Dad a long time to realize that MAN was not his friend. I think Dad got into a lot of debt with this man, and he ran away up-here-in Brooklyn, New York. He never did, tell me the true story. He never told me much of anything. People would call it a "Generation gap", but I think it was more of a "Communication gap."

I do remember him once saying "Bob, ya know I ain't had no chance to go to school. I had to work on the farm. I want you to go to school and be a barber. (Who in the hell wants to be a barber?) I tried to do my best with you. I can't help the way you been living. You know I tried to do my best. Ya mama can tell you that." I remember my Daddy started crying. He just laid his head against the wall and cried. I felt full of sentiment, pity and shame for him. I know he had a guilt complex that was eating him away. I really felt low watching Big Strong Pop Cry. I looked at them damn old dirty overalls and that checked shirt he had on. He wore these clothes every day. His big lips were encircled with a huge mustache. He always cut all his hair off but as it grew back I could tell he was graying. He even had a few gray hairs on his eyebrows. I used to think alcohol was killing him but today I knew his conscience was the real killer. Alcohol was his escape route. I really felt sorry for him. I looked at him and let him watch me cry too. I was not proud to let him see me cry, but it was my only way of saying, I understand.

I remembered one night a white cop came to the apartment "smiling", he told us they had come to take Dad to jail for indecent exposure. He claimed Dad had zipped his pants down and peed in front of a white lady's steps. Well that's how he got his first free "trip" downtown, they gave him six months. He kept getting into trouble when he got out. He finally left home. Ma couldn't understand why. Everybody said he was no good to leave ma and me. People said he didn't love us. For some reason I have always felt that he left home because he did love us. He knew he would never be able to hold a job and love us. He knew he would never stop drinking. He knew we were miserably with Ma being the only one working. Ma only made \$30 a week. I swear only \$30 a week. I know Dad knew we could get on the welfare if he was not there. I know a lot of men that left home for the same reason. We did get on the welfare just like Dad had planned. We got some surplus goods and a check each month. I got some overalls, army boots and some checked shirts. People would come to the apartment at the beginning of each month to buy some of the goods. Ma would sell it. I was glad. I hated to see it in the apartment.

I really felt sorry for Ma because if she didn't have me she could have left the apartment. She was a good looking woman. Although she was in her mid-thirties, she could have passed for twenty any day, any man would love to have talked to Ma. She had beautiful skin, without a pimple, wrinkle or scar on it. She was very slim. Her complexion was light brown and her large thick lips made her pug nose look much smaller than it really was. A thick jet black Afro concealed the shape of her head but caused it to look much larger than it was. It blended in perfectly with her large eyebrows. She took life with a smile. She had so much faith in God, America, and herself that it was unbelievable. She had struggled and tried so hard to make life better for me. I can honestly say she gave, she dedicated her life so that I could live at least in comfort. I hope Ma do get to read this story so she will know how much I appreciated all the things she did. You see, I was such a fool. I never told Ma how much I loved her. I thought it made me look like a "sissy". It makes no difference now because I do love you and I do appreciate all the things you have done for me in life. Thank God for you, Ma.

I sometimes hated the sight of our apartment. I heard there was no place like home. Well, I pray to God there is no other place like my home, but I know there are many more right around the corner. The kitchen leaked until the ceiling had swollen. It sort of hung down almost touching Ma's head. The walls was sort of gray-greenish looking like the bottom of a river or a lake. I never bothered to find out what color they were supposed to be but I knew damn well green was not it. The table in the kitchen was one Daddy made out of some carts we found behind the A&P store. It looked pretty nice sometimes when Ma covered it with a table cloth and fixed a real good meal for us. We sat on drink cartons. They never really bothered me unless someone came to the house when we were eating.

Thoughts of our bed-room still linger with me. My bed was an old couch covered with cotton to keep the springs from sticking in me. A long time ago Dad peed in my bed and I think the smell is still there. It is probably all in my mind but I could swear the bed still has an awful smell. Ma had a small folding bed that she and Dad used to share. I remember when I was small they used to make love in the same room with me. It was okay when I was small because I didn't know what was going on. As I grew up and realized what they had done, I almost hated them. I would always make up excuses for them. I know Ma felt bad about it. I am glad I didn't ever bring it up. As far as Dad was concerned he didn't give a shit. At least that's how I know he would have put it, they were man and wife, so I might as well face the facts. I did, but oh, how it hurts. I remembered one day we got out of school early because of the snow. Ma had got off work early because she was afraid to ride the buses in the snow anyway, the apartment was so cold I felt water running out my eyes. A glass of coca-cola sitting on the table had almost frozen. I decided to get in the bed. Ma was already in bed. My bed was cold so I thought it was a good idea to put my cover on Ma's bed and both of us sleep in her bed. At least we'd both be warm. Ma gave me a funny look but she said okay. So I put my blankets as well as some of the cotton out of the couch over us in bed. I guess we were in bed about a half an hour before somebody ring the door bell. I was too sleepy to get up and Ma was asleep. I yelled come in.

A voice from the kitchen said, "Where are you?" I said in the bedroom. Unfortunately it was the white social worker. She sort of turned blue, then red looking. She turned up her nose and sort of sarcastically said, "I hope I didn't break up anything." Ma woke up just in time to hear the remark. She looked so hurt. Can you believe she accused Ma of letting me make love to her? You know anybody would know damn well I wouldn't want to make love to my own mother. She put her comments in some kind of report. She raised hell about the apartment being dirty and about it being cold. Ma didn't have time to clean up except on week-ends. The lady refused to listen to reason. We told her why I was in bed. She said it was silly for a sixteen-year-old boy to be in his mother's bed for any reason. I admit it was out of the ordinary, but can't you see my living conditions was not ordinary? How could anybody be so cruel and merciless?

Everybody on the block was saying I was caught in the bed with my mother. I looked for someone to say it to my face but they never did. Somebody would always tell me they heard someone else say it but I knew they were thinking it too. I guess time made me forget to think about it 24 hours a day. There was a time when that lie haunted me every minute of the day. Even today I hate to think or write about it but I know it was a significant event in my life. I don't know whether it was because the lady was white, the cops was white or what but, I do know this white lady forced me to hate people. I soon had the belief that anything bad for the white man had to be good for the Black man and I was now mad enough to deal with the man by any means necessary.

I wish I had enough time to write an autobiography of my life to let everyone read what I think of this highly idealistic American dream. I know I only have a few minutes left, so let me get to the events that led to the killing of the cops. I have seen too many people beaten on the head with those nigger boppers the pigs carry. I have been beaten on the head and taken down town for merely being close to the scene of a crime. Still I have been indoctrinated all my life to believe in the "equal democracy." If our democracy is so damn good, then why in the hell are we cramming it down the throats of others, all over the world with a gun? America is no longer a dedicated new nation but a sick empire. People have talked about how a revolution is coming, which I believe is true. I know that when it comes (and it is coming) the system must buck under and stop playing those nigger-honky games. To destroy this system the revolution must begin within and outside of the nation because destroying 50 states will not destroy this empire. I know enough about America to know there is justice and equality for only a few. This country passed a civil right bill a few years ago that was one of the most degrading documents in the history of man since the Emancipation Proclamation. America claims to be giving its people human rights; human rights are a gift from God and no man is worthy to give or to take them away.

This nation is so sick, insane and out of its mind that it is policing and destroying the future of twenty million people and I know by now you know I mean Black people. These oppressed people are retaliating the only way they know how; violence.

They see life in a new perspective with new eyes. New eyes bring inexperience, thus allowing for mistakes. As a part of such a people I am one that must give up. I can't focus a better tomorrow for my people. I guess I have been brain-washed and indoctrinated with crime, illiteracy and poverty so long that I can't see beyond these three illegitimate babies. The only thing I ever related to in life was an apartment that I had to call home. Some cops were entering into my castle looking for me with a warrant. I don't know today what crime the warrant was for because I have committed so many in the past few weeks. I know these men were kicking my door to my home. They didn't bother to knock. They didn't bother to announce themselves although I did know who they were. I would have felt less than a man to let them force their way into my home. I would have let them in, I swear I would have. The only regret I have about dying now is I regret I can't die standing up. Well, here they come after me. I'll mail the letter home hoping Ma will get it published for me. I wish I could say some great words before I go. Let me see, can I think of a quick prayer. I got it. Oh God . . . no, oh America take a good look at your ghetto reflections that are giving birth to thousands like me. Please America, let there be no more ghettos.

## "The Clue"

by A. Marsh

### Part Five

We left the strangled corpse where it lay and immediately telephoned for the police. They came with their photographers, surgeons, and detectives and tramped all about trying to ferret the mystery that had so disturbed our little humdrum lives.

Auntie Climaxe and I were in the living room; I administered generous doses of cowslip wine to the old woman, blanched with the symptoms of shock.

"Mr. Hawthorne," said Inspector Raphylltackett, "I should like to ask you some questions."

"Of course."

"Is the deceased of your acquaintance?"

"Definitely not."

"What exactly happened here?"

I then explained how we heard the thud and found the body.

The sleuth only nodded. He interrogated me further and then stood up to depart.

"I'm putting two guards here," he said. "Just for your protection, you know."

"Thank you."

My aunt had overcome her stricken state (but continued to sip the cowslip wine.)

"I think you should rest, my dear," I informed Auntie, who assented.

"I'll read in bed," she said and took up her recent bookclub selection MURDER ON THE BLASTED HEATH (by Helen Highwater).

The spinster reading and dozing in her bedroom, a futile task since the police had thoroughly combed it. Suddenly, there was a timid knock on the front door. I peered through the rather conspicuous peephole and saw Sister Millicent and another religious companion.

"Auntie's not well," I told them.

"I'm sure she'd want to see us," insisted Sister Millicent. "It's excessively important."

"And how!" chorused the other nun, whose name I discovered was Sister Doris.

"Well, I suppose you may go up," I said with plain misgivings. The black draped women entered and mounted the steps with utter silence. I heard them enter Auntie's chamber and the door close.

I migrated to the kitchen for a tall glass of Ovaltine (Chocolate-flavored) and was really enjoying that beverage when a tiny scream from the upper floor arrested my attention. I knew it was my Aunt!

I swiftly seized a seam ripper from the notions cabinet and ran (who knows what two desperate nuns will do??).

"I'm coming, Precious Relative!" I shouted, flinging open the bedroom door, ready for anything.

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