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A Black Mother's Day Story in the Age of Post-Race in Amerikkka Represent Our Resistance

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Black**C**ommentator.com **Editorial Board**

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It's a simple story plot. Mother and daughter await the arrival of the "college girl." College girl arrives. Mother hugs college girl, and the sister hugs college girl. Soon, it's the mother and her daughters - and home. Family and friends come to be in the home of the mother and her daughters. Soon the college girl is among a collective, and they're singing, eating, dancing, and laughing.

"I wait in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon." It's more comfortable than most people would imagine, almost "an extended living room" where people can come and sit under the elm tree and feel the breeze.

Maggie, a grown daughter now, is nervous. Maggie, "homely and ashamed of the burn scar down her arms and legs," stands in a corner.

"In real life," the mother is a "big-boned woman" with "man-working hands." She sleeps in flannel and works in overalls, because she works. There's always work, from sunup to sundown. Her "fat" keeps her warm in cold weather.

The mother "never had an education." But Dee, lighter than Maggie, and not scared by the old house fire, wanted nice things, expensive things. The mother and the church raised money "to send her [Dee] to Augusta to school."

The daughter, the college girl, Dee, would read to her and Maggie: She "burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the

serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand."

"But there they are," the mother observes.

It's Dee and her boyfriend. Dee, wearing big gold earrings and dangling bracelets, is in a "dress so loud it hurts her eyes." *She's a "regular" material girl, this daughter!* "Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!" she says, and the young man says, "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister." Before the mother can rise from her chair ("it takes something of a push"), Dee begins to take pictures of the house, her mother, and sister. Then she comes to kiss her mother on the forehead. *Flighty. Dee sees them from her perch.*

Dee is now "Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"

"What happened to 'Dee'?' I wanted to know."

What happened to Dee? –named after her Grandma Dee, called "Big Dee."

What happened to the honored memory of an immediate ancestor? What happens to that particular history of Big Dee?

At the table, with the familiar stable of what became known as "soul food," the mother notes that the young man doesn't eat and Dee talks "a blue streak over the sweet potatoes." It was all so fascinating for Dee as if all were manna from a foreign world. *A material and a condescending girl! Self-important and unreflective. Everyone and everything is objectified from that perch.* The mother thinks: even the benches made by the hands of her deceased husband, the daughters' father, when they "couldn't afford to buy chairs," fascinate Dee as it would fascinate unknowing outsiders. The benches are "lovely" now.

Dee leaves the table and looks at the "churn" her uncle Buddy made. She "needs" that churn! "And I want the dasher, too."

"Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," Maggie says real low. But Dee says, Maggie's "brain is like an elephant."

The mother knows now that there's another kind of war. Her home has been invaded from without by means of someone within. Familial relationships have been fragmented. What is labeled by the outside - progress - turns out to be more than a singular point of attack. Send the weapons of mass, stealthy destruction out from within!

When dinner was done, Dee "went to the trunk at the foot of my bed." She was eyeing the quilts that "had been pierced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee." The mother then had "hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them." The quilts had patterns: "the Lone Star," the "Walk Around the Mountain." They were made from scrapes of Grandma Dee's dresses, dresses she wore for "fifty and more years ago." They had "bits and pieces of Grandpa Jerrell's Paisley shirts" and one "tiny faded blue piece" came from "Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War."

"Can I have these old quilts?" *A girl has a warped sense of entitlement!!*

The mother heard something fall in the kitchen where Maggie was cleaning up.

She asks Dee to take "one or two of the others."

Dee doesn't want those, stitched by machine. She wanted the old quilts, the quilts documenting family history, indeed, collective history.

They are Maggie's quilts, the mother tells her. They have been passed to Maggie.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!"

The mother remembered that when she offered one of the quilts to Dee before she left for college, Dee told her they were "old fashioned, out of style." Now, Dee says, "they're *priceless!*" Maggie could make more!

And we will have nothing left that is ours. Everything can be categorized, appraised, and sold for a price - including our everyday humanity, becoming useful only to function within the market system. The mother *knew* this without the writer saying she did because she would know that her life and the life of her children depended on her knowing something that can't be taught at educational institutions, an arm of the market system.

"What would *you* do with them?"

The only thing you "*could*" do - hang them!

The only thing you could do with our history now - hang it in a display as something transcended, something distant, indeed, dead. Fill the new façade of attire, hair, and new names with emptiness. Fill it with other people's values of what is and isn't priceless. Substitute the functional with the trivial and the ultimate blurring of the other's way of calculating the worth of human beings and their culture and history so as to make it less harmful, less threatening. Black lived experiences and heritage are a mere collection of anecdotes and artifacts to the daughter, the one who should pass it on.

What happened to Dee? What happened to the child I sent away to be educated?

The mother looks at Maggie who had come out of the kitchen. "She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "*I* can remember Grandma Dee without the quilts," Maggie says.

The mother looks at Dee, looks hard at Dee. *What a waste of clothe made by the hands of Africans who, when weaving the threads out of necessity, would never have considered such misuse.* She looks at Maggie.

"I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap."

"Take one or two of the others."

Dee walked out and met up with the young man. "You don't understand."

Understand what?

Your heritage!

"You ought to try to make something of yourself, too Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."

The mother watches Maggie smile as Dee put on her sunglasses. The mother watches the car dust settle. She asks Maggie to bring a "dip of snuff," and the two of them sat in the yard, "just enjoying," until it was time to go into the house.

The same college girl appears today. She out-numbers the Maggies of our community. Her name is neither Dee, named after her grandma nor is it Wangero. Her attire is a business suit. Her hair is dark and as silky as she can afford to make it. She's not bluesy or jazzy.

Among her white friends, children of liberal parents, she fits right in. The white friends don't need to know anything about her heritage, about her need to continue to resist. She doesn't *want* to know either. The anecdotes and artifacts don't even exist for her. Everything of the Black American past (and its future?) is an old memory belonging to the "Civil Rights" generation. This is what she's learned, what she's been taught to believe, so she doesn't know that what she doesn't know suits her friends and their parents just fine.

She doesn't know that it's not *her* idea or the ideas of her generation that seeks to eliminate the struggle, to kill resistance to the fascist takeover beginning with Blacks in America. She doesn't know that the abhorrence and dismissal of her mothers and her grandmas and her great-grandmas is the design of an old tactic of divide and conquer.

And while the last 40 years since the "Civil Rights" movement has witnessed white backlash and has sent Blacks in America back 50 years, to a widening gap in health, education, employment but a higher rate of incarceration, she will hip hop to the mall with white friends singing of one America, signing "we are the same" - white Americans! Empire at its best work!

They have taken our children and gone down the river with them where they've morphed into zombies.

And the mothers and grandmas know the white people have done it again! They've conquered from within. They have come into the yard, one more time - *and we let them in!*

The short story, "Everyday Use" (from In Love & Trouble: Stories of Black Women) was written by Alice Walker and published in 1973 (before the era of Black capitulation to the free market enterprise and Post-Race Amerikkka).

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