Revelations

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The trolley runs past the white stucco buildings, past the beautiful tailored gardens, into the heartbeat of the city. Parades march through the street trailing hundreds of black bouncing bodies. There is dancing in Bourbon Street on Mardi Gras."

Cover Page Footnote
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The trolley spits her out onto the pavement. She is thin, blondish. She blends. People push their way to the liquor stands set up on the sidewalks. Her body shakes, a deep pit of anticipation. Trash lies in the gutter, people lie in the gutter. Up the street a group is singing, "We all live in a yellow submarine," Jessica stands watching. Thousands of miles away people go to buy wine. She thinks of the eight dollars she made selling her watch, feeling her change. The old man watches, tugs at her arm.

"Missy, you have some for me?"

He tugs harder, pulling her into the alley. Jessica beats his blue arms. He is gone. She remembers his breath, stale and wet, the shoes he was wearing. They curled at the toes and were cracked in the middle. Her mother had made her wear saddle shoes with good arch supports till she was thirteen. Thousands of miles away, deep valley mountains close in. The dead fish river leads to other dried rivers. Here the wide naked sea is.

Jessica drinks the red wine. Why is it she's come? She touches her foot. It has fallen asleep. She stumps nineteen years up and down. The magnetic crowd draws her into the tide.

"Hey, baby, can you spare a sip of the wine?" Standing with big hands, he is demanding. "You alone?"

It must be her smile, warm wicked hook. She tosses him the bottle, shaking her head, lifting her small slender hands. "I don't know."

The man is after her, guessing. She turns, picks up a cup from the ground. "Help the needy. Help the poor." Blessed are the thirsty, for they shall be satisfied.

Jessica blinks her eyes rapidly. The street is 1920, a night of neon signs. A row of strip joints posts its wares on the walls of the street. She crouches under the moneytaker, afraid to go in. His pants are smelly. He gets in her way. She glimpses the legs of a dancer. People are screaming. Money strikes the legs. The face and breasts bend to pick up the money. She is grotesquely twisted, still trying to dance. Hands reach out to her, to grab her.

"Get the hell outta here before you find yourself flat on your ass!"

Frightened, Jessica runs. Runs from the lent-out look of the face, her ho-hum routine that fills empty bellies. Empty. The street is for beggars. Jessica stops for the asking, snatches the bottle from the charitable man. It is wild beast night as the full moon shines. The little Creole man serves Southern fried chicken from his cave in the street. Jessica reaches into her pocket trying to dig beyond the lint in her nails. The fat man with thick juicy cheeks emerges, plate piled so high. She feels light with a deep breath of the street stench. She floats past the fat man screaming in slow motion, snatches the food, disappears into side-street shadows. Backwards his face is contorted. His tongue hangs out. Jessica laughs, gobbles the meat.

The alley is muffled by extended brick. Jessica is a hole in a hole, making the noise of the street sound false. The cold has been...
waiting in this casket hallway. It drives her out. The light breaks open upon her again. Two handsome cowboys, real Texan drawls. She wants to flow over. She winks.

"Howdy partner."

The heroes of the last frontier. They follow her down the street.

"What you-all doing, honey, sweet girl like you?"

Cowboys, shoot to the point, to the head. "How's 'bout a walk to the levee?"

You-all, you-all. Jessica expands, warms.

"Oh, to the levee," she sings.

Rocks piled up along a fake beach front. Jessica hears water lick the shore. Bodies lie together partly hidden by abandoned railroad shacks. The chill off the water is serious.

"Listen, sweetheart, what you all lookin for? A pickup?"

"Maybe." Laughs. "Maybe not."

Not yet. The cowboys cannot understand. Jessica waits for the old West to vanish. She squats in the moonlight, watching the urine flow black down the rock, sees the blue-white glow of her skin. The whole world is her outhouse. Such a long way from home, squatting in the refuse of a bygone time, New Orleans should be warmer than this. She wishes she had worn a heavier jacket.

Far away Jessica hears another parade coming. She hurries to meet the noise, to beat the chill. A man has bought his lady an ostrich feather from the balloon man as the last float goes by. High in the light, iron railings block plush apartments. Smug faces hold martinis, women in Paris dresses.

"Say hello to the nice ladies, Jessica."

A man and woman lean over, toss confetti. Toss money. Crumbs to the peasants. Jessica picks up the chicken bone plates, empty cans, empty bottles.

"Hey, lady!"

Bones fly. The street is in melody. Jessica hears the screams of a woman, the sprinkle of glass. There is blood. The man is yelling for the police. The horses are charg-