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The Last Days of Louisiana Red

If the corporate pig is the oink in charge of Animal Farm, the Moocher is the parasite who slips and slides about in his intestine.

Moochers are people who when they are to blame say it's the other fellow's fault for bringing it up. Moochers don't return stuff they borrow. Moochers ask you to share when they have nothing to share. Moochers kill their enemies like the South American insect which kills its foe by squirting it with its own blood. God do they suffer: "look at all of the suffering I'm going through because of you." Moochers talk and don't do. You should hear them just the same. Moochers tell other people what to do. Men Moochers blame everything on women. Women Moochers blame everything on men. Old Moochers say it's the young's fault; young Moochers say the old messed up the world they have to live in. Moochers play sick a lot. Moochers think it's real hip not to be able to read and write. Moochers stay in the bathtub a long time. Though Moochers wrap themselves in the full T-shirt of ideology, their only ideology is Mooching.

Moochers aren't necessarily poor though some are: Moochers inject themselves between the poor and what other people who are a little better off than the poor set aside for the poor. Like the hoggish Freedman's Bureau crook or anti-poverty embezzler or the do-do student who

depleted the Afro-American studies treasury to bring Detroit up to the campus because he was homesick when Detroit got up and rapped everybody to sleep. The highest order of this species of Moocher is the President who uses the taxpayers' money to build homes all over the world where he can be alone to contemplate his place in history when history don't even want him. Moochers are a special order of parasite not even a beneficial parasite but one that takes, takes energy, takes supplies. Moochers write you letters saying reply at once or at your earliest convenience, we are in a hurry, may I hear from you soon or please get right back to me promptly

Moochers threaten to jump out of the window if you don't love them. The Moocher drug is heroin; the Moocher song is "Willow Weep for Me"; Moochers ask you for the same address over and over again. Moochers are the tramps, the idlers, the big bags of wind, emotional muggers from all of the movements of the sixties left right negro white young old male female and some categories we haven't even gotten to yet. They decided to start an organization themselves, their only principle is the lack of principle. This is a story about one of those Americans who fought a corporate pig as well as the pest which wheels and deals in its belly, a story of one American and others like him who took their factory skills and went underground.

For Ed Yellings it all began when he abandoned the rarified world of ideals and put his roots to business. Some say it happened when he returned from a trip to New Orleans.

Ishmael's Reed's most recent books are Mumbo Jumbo, a novel, and Chattanooga, a book of poetry. He was nominated for two National Book Awards in 1973.

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by Ishmael Reed

When Ed returned to Berkeley, so named because Bishop George Berkeley, the philosopher, coined the phrase: "Westward, the course of empire takes its way," people noticed the change at once. Rather than resuming his chores, Ed bought an abandoned land on the Marina and here he built his Solid Gumbo Works, a mysterious building surrounded by a large fence erected to keep out the curious.

People could only guess what Ed was up to. When asked his purpose, Ed would merely answer that he had gone into the gumbo business. Though no one could testify to having seen it or tasted it, Ed's gumbo began making waves; though ordinary salesmen hated it, distributors wouldn't touch it and phony cuisinieres gave it a bad name, no one could deny that, however unexplained, there was some kind of operation going on at Ed's gumbo premises: limos could be seen arriving and departing; others got theirs through subscription. Whatever Ed was selling the people were buying, and rather than put his product on the shelves next to the synthetic wares of a poisonous, noxious time, Ed catered to a small sophisticated elite, and all he cared about was whether they paid their dues. In a town like Berkeley, as in any other small town, superstitiousness and primitive beliefs were rife and so was their hideous sister, gossip.

Now Ed's wife, Ruby, had left him with four children: Minnie, the youngest, Street, the oldest, and Wolf and Sister, the in-betweens. Minnie and Street caused Ed anguish; by the time Street was sixteen his father had extricated him from many a jam, and since Ed was seen by the town's white folks as a good nigger—he wore a suit and tie and drove a BMW, had taught at the University and had good credit—his son was often able to get off with "light sentences."

The boy would often chide his father on his lack of "militancy," as he was led out of the cellblock where he had been placed for assault rape extortion but mostly assault. Street loved to fight. Fightin' and Eatin', and the stark name children scribble on the wall to denote a woman's privates.

Minnie, though no delinquent, would try to wear her father down. She would often engage in toe-to-toe verbal combat with her father. No! she wasn't going to wash the dishes; cleaning up your room was for the birds; if he didn't like what time she came in at night, that was his problem; she went out of her way to come on "field." The only person Minnie would mind was her Nanny. She loved this jolly, robust, happy-go-lucky creature who was hired to look after the children after Minnie's mother Ruby ran off to the east to enter politics. Ed never spanked her; he characterized spanking as "Louisiana Red"; he had a cryptic way of expressing himself. As the years went by, he became weary of fighting with his youngest daughter and so Ed would try to appease her with gifts he'd never give the other children. When she reached her teens, she was the only member of her set who owned a Porsche. Sister was a good, clear-eyed child who, though not as pretty as Minnie, had nimble fingers. She was so good at sewing that she opened her own boutique. She never complained when ordered to bed or to put away her playthings. Wolf was already cunning, quiet, and serious.

As time passed, more and more of Ed's time was spent at the Solid Gumbo Works, and so the booming business of his enterprise wouldn't allow him to spend as much time with his children. He lived in the Berkeley Hills located in the northern section of the town, called "White town." Negroes and poor whites lived in "Dark town" or "Bukra town" which was the area located below Grove Street in the "flats." The area running through the border segments was referred to as "Japtown."

A good portion of the Dark town and Bukra town was located across the railroad tracks which traveled on Bonar Street. Ed liked it in the Berkeley Hills house secluded by large trees even though, once, a cross was burned on his lawn. He was even able to hire a Nanny Lisa, a hefty, spread-out black woman who showed up mysteriously to inquire about the job before Ed had even placed the help wanted ad in the *Berkeley Gazette*. What luck Ed had thought at the time, and, faithful to her promise, Nanny was very good with the kids and especially good with Minnie. She was able to cure some of Minnie's bad habits like wresting the leg of the turkey for herself when she knew that it was Ed's favorite part of the meat; sitting in his favorite chair and smoking his private cigarettes. But as Minnie grew older, her techniques of hostility towards her father lost their crude edge, the crude edge she had developed after her mother Ruby had left the household on that night Minnie would never forget.

Ruby Yellings, Miss Atlantic City '65, never did take to Berkeley. After a Ferris Wheel romance which saw its ups and downs she and Ed were married and, as many people who try to introduce some dramatic element into their lives to stave off a divorce, they had children. Motherhood bored Ruby and so she began to seek dalliances with other men.

One night, after a nasty quarrel which seemed more intense than the others, Ruby and her husband came to blows. All of the children were in bed except Minnie who, not one to mind her own business, crept to the door of the children's bedroom and heard her mother and father arguing. Minnie couldn't hear everything, only: "I'd like to see you try it." She called Minnie's father a chump, a punk, a dope, a joker, a dingaling, a dingbat, a jiveass, kissass—she threw the book of invective at him. She insulted Ed's father, his grandfather, his uncles—all of the males in Ed's line. She told Ed that he could "eat her Burger." First there was a pause. Then a loud CLAP! Minnie heard her mother tumbling down the stairs, and Minnie, crouching there in the bedroom door, could see her father standing over her mother, huge, majestic, while behind him, in the oil portrait, wearing a strange yellow top hat, red jacket, and standing next to a handsome auburn-colored horse with a silver-trimmed saddle, an old steepled skyline of New Orleans behind him, stood Doc John, who had been identified by her father to her as an ancient New Orleans astrologer and diviner.

"YOU CRAZY DEVIL. SMACKING ME LIKE THAT. I'LL REPORT YOU TO THE MAN. I'LL REPORT YOUR BURGER. YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE USING THAT GRANT MONEY FOR RESEARCH BUT INSTEAD YOU'RE DOWN IN THE BASEMENT MAKING THEM OLD SMELLY FORMULAS."

Ed whispered, nearly inaudible. He told her mother to cease her raving because the children would overhear them.

"I DON'T CARE IF THEY DO. I . . ." but before her mother could say anything Ed slapped her again. Sent her reeling against the wall, next to the door, this time with a bloodied nose. Her dress slid up over her knees, revealing aspects of the body that brought her beauty fame.

Ruby sobbed for awhile. Ed coolly circled the room, smoking a Camel. She rose, brushed herself off, and regained her composure.

"I'll send for my bags tomorrow. You'll hear from my lawyers, too." Minnie saw her mother turn and walk out of the house but not before directing a hostile ancient sign toward her father: placing a thumb in her nose and wagging her fingers. Later word arrived that Minnie's mother had gone east.

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Never would she submit to a man. After this episode she began to behave surly towards her father. She pouted and wise cracked when he greeted her in the morning. She was rude to Ed's fellow Workers. Sometimes she'd get so angry when she heard of his accomplishments she'd fly into Nanny Lisa's apron, whereupon Nanny Lisa would fix her some pancakes. That would make the child happy. She loved pancakes, especially topped with syrup. She would gobble them up, and Nanny would smile broadly, real broadly, and say, "That chile sho loves to put away them flapjacks." After which Nanny would bathe her and tuck her in perhaps while singing a rousing version of "Take It Right Back to the Place Where You Got It I Don't Want Any of It In Here" and other songs depicting men as brutish wayfaring louts. After the child was tucked in Nanny would tell her those stories about the "Widow Paris," and her running combat with Doc John, a mean uppity diabolical smarty pants ("Mr. Bigshot, Who Do You Think You Are?").

Minnie loved these stories in which the Widow Paris, Marie, would always best Doc John, prevail over this no account ruffian.

Minnie was becoming suspicious of her father. What did her mother mean when she accused him of making formulas in the basement which had been long since locked up. When Ed opened his Solid Gumbo Works on the Berkeley Marina. (She liked Marie to win and would laugh her little chirren chitter when Doc John was brought down to size.)

What was this gumbo? She would ask Nanny about this gumbo and Nanny would cook it for her; but she knew that her Dad wasn't in the restaurant business, so what kind of gumbo was it? Nanny was as in the dark about the operation as she was. Once she had seen her Nanny going through her Dad's papers and she and Ed had a fight about it until Nanny had finally convinced the man that she merely was looking for some change to pay the paperboy. Her father was touchy and uptight. What did he have to hide?

Years passed. Minnie enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley in Rhetoric (they have a Ph.D. program) because she was good at that. Sister entered the boutique business. Wolf went into his father's Gumbo business which was no surprise to Minnie; Wolf had been just

like her father: secretive, taciturn, smart. Too goddam smart for her money. Bro. Street went to jail for busting one of his street companions on the head with a lead pipe. Minnie got along with Street better than she did with Wolf and Sister.

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In Berkeley, Moochism was becoming the thing to be. Books on Moochism appeared on the bookstore shelves while the *Partisan Review* was hardly moving. The prose style was a little too "dudish" for this quiet little university town. Minnie was happy about the outpouring of Moocher buttons. She was particularly pleased with one which read: "I Am A Moocher." Minnie had risen in the Moocher's ranks, making quite a name for herself as orator and rhetorician. For her appearances she was provided with female body guards known as the Dahomeyan Softball Team. There were Moocher songs, Moocher tie clips and Moocher bumper stickers; Wall Street predicted that Moochism would be one of the top thirty-five trends in the U.S. to succeed.

Minnie was content. She wriggled about Telegraph Ave. like a chicken without a neck. Then it happened.

Solid Gumbo Works had invented a gumbo that became a cure for cancer. Crowds gathered submitting their walking-dead loved ones. Newsmen came. Gumbo came to be seen as a cureall dish, and the health food stores were in trouble. The Co-op had to slash their prices to compete. And if this happened to these economical and consumer-minded stores, you can imagine the panic at Safeways. The people didn't want to Mooch when they could have Gumbo, and so the Moochers' recruits fell off. Once while Minnie was rhetoricizing, a man got up and said "We're sick of hearing that dumb Burger, you Burger-Burger you." Minnie was sad. Even though eighteen, she clung to the massive heaving bosom of her Nanny, and Nanny would rock her to sleep like she used to, staring at the child with her old shiny mammy eyes as she prayed to Saint Peter to look down on this chile. Outside, the Dahomeyan Softball Team, Minnie's bodyguards, would mill about as Nanny would issue hourly press bulletins on the state of Minnie's despondency. They were some fierce rough-looking butch faces led by this big old 6 foot bruiser they all called the "REICHSFUHRER." (Break a man's jaw.)

Ed, Wolf and some Workers came up to the house one night to discuss some gumbo business and ran into this strange vigil. The Dahomeyan Softball Team looked at the men angrily. Nanny was in the midst of telling Minnie one of those stories about Doc John, and how when Marie, by that time, the "last American witch," finished with him, she had him eating out of her hand.

"What's wrong with Minnie?" Ed asked as he led the guests and Wolf into his study.

"Ah don't know, Mistuh Ed. Seems she haint feeling too good. I going to fix the chile some buttermilk and put her to bed."

"I hope she feels better," Ed said as the company moved into Ed's private room.

Nanny undressed Minnie and had the child drink some nice warm buttermilk. Minnie's body possessed all of the

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Special Report

The Middle East War

I. The Mood in Tel Aviv

It is a tragic irony that in 1967, starting from behind “insecure” borders, with the world convinced they would lose, the Israelis smashed their enemies, while in 1973, with “secure” boundaries and a military organization considered to be one of the world’s best, Israel almost lost the war.

The price for not losing was paid by the young Israelis. The staggering number of 18, 19, and 20 year olds who were killed or injured is enough, by itself, to scar the country’s soul for many years, especially since no one can be certain that another war will not erupt. Hardly a city street or a rural settlement is without its dead. Every family in the country mourns for its own or for the dead sons of friends and relatives.

During the first few days of the war, the news from the battlefronts was always bad. “There was a new disaster every three minutes,” one high officer said and every hour on the hour when the radios were turned on, Israelis listened with disbelief and dismay. Not even the laundered and censored reports could hide the fact that the war was going badly. Even after the battletrend had been reversed and the Israelis began striking back, a palpable sense of pessimism hung like a miasmatic dark cloud over the country.

Israeli misery over the war and its consequences is intensified, too, because the Arab strength and vigor was completely unexpected. And the pain is not lessened because the Arab losses were also incredibly high. That fact in itself

disturbs Israelis because it means that their previous conviction about Arab cowardice was wrong, too: the great majority of the Arab soldiers who were killed or wounded were lost in battles, not in flight.

“They’re acting like suicide squadrons!” shouted a whitefaced and shaken Israeli colonel as he ran into his commanding officer’s bunker. “They’re knocking out our tanks by standing up in front of them and firing until the tanks crush them!”

Before this war, every Israeli of every political persuasion was convinced that the country’s military capabilities were so great any enemy could be overcome in combat. But now they realize, at a great cost, that their self-confidence, bordering on arrogance, was misplaced and that their military leaders vacillated and blundered just as much as did their political chiefs.

After their 1967 victory, many Israelis feasted, indeed gorged themselves on their military prowess while their government based its fundamental political principles on an attitude of complacency, of not needing to embark on bold, imaginative political steps towards peace because of Israel’s military superiority.

Understandably, then, the initial Israeli response to this war was to argue only about the military successes and failures; now, however, many people in the country are beginning to link the technical military failures to possible political miscalculations. Today, it is assumed, for example,

by Paul Jacobs