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Cool Ash Ceiling

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COOL ASH CEILING

I know how a coal feels,
When separated from the fire,
As the cool, white ash forms
'Round its hot center.

He lies with his arms under his head,
Studying the dark invisible ceiling.
I lie with my back to him, untouching.
Fear lies between us.

He fears my demands.
My demands exist in his mind.
I fear his rejection.
The rejection is in his fear.

We both want the same thing:
Not to become a sunflower, whose face follows the sun for o
summer.

Fear lies between us.
So we grow whiter and whiter,
As the light grows to reveal
The horror of the way we are.

--Deborah Conner

Its colors were changed
 And given misshapened shapes.
 A cry of agony and rage.
 Echoed 'round the walls,
 Echoed and doubled and doubled,
 Echoed and doubled,
 Until the walls were fragmented.
 When the shattered glass lay 'round my feet
 I realized the cry had been my own.
 And I stretched a white, steady hand
 Towards the blue sky and green tree.
 And on my hand was a ring of gold.
 --Deborah Conner

HONORABLE MENTION: SHORT STORY

by Larry Garland

NEOPHYTE AT FIVE AND A HALF

Great globules of dew clung stubbornly to my newly polished shoes as I raced toward the bus. The day so long thought about, talked about, dreamed about, had finally arrived. Innocently, I ran out to meet it.

The focal point of my attention was that bus; all other things became merely peripheral. I remember the eastern sun only because it transformed the yellow bus into sunshine. I remember the dusty road only because of the grumble of the tires as they grated to a stop on the loose dirt and gravel. I remember the dew only because of the way it quivered on the hood of the bus. Most vividly; however, I remember the unique way the door swung open to beckon me inside. Looking up those two or three steps that loomed before me, I stood alone beside that great airgulfing noise maker. I took one honeysuckle-deep breath and scurried up to find a seat. I hesitantly traced an imagined letter in the cold, cracked vinyl at my side. At last with growing confidence, I slid over near the window. Then with both hands clasped firmly on the bar across the seat in front of me, I eased forward until my nose just brushed the smooth, cool metal. It smelled of strange, unknown excitement!

Before me was the driver, beyond him was the road. A moment's uneasiness tickled my spine. I spun around in my seat. Behind me, near the back, were some older boys. Beyond them were the massive slabs of dusty, graffiti-infested glass which made up the rear window of the bus. Through the rearranged dust that made a word I could not read, I saw home. The house seemed empty somehow, like a bird's nest in autumn. I looked toward home until a twisted clump of wild plum trees blocked my view. Then I slowly turned back around to face the oncoming road. I now know that the word scrawled on the dusty glass was a prophetic goodbye.

PARALLEX W'S PROBLEM

"Mummy, Mummy, read me a bedtime story."
 "Okay. But just a short one. This story is from

The Galaxy Annals of Knowledge, 2180 A. D.
 Filing Code- Macro: Extinguished Worlds
 Micro: Racism
 Source: Retrieved Space Capsule."

Parallex W was a nice planet. Tall trees arched gracefully in the eternal 90 m.p.h. methane winds. Streamlined homes stooped elegantly in the intense glow of the Twins-givers of light by day. And nighttime held a special treat for romantics, for the habitats glowed radiantly for several hours after lightdown and burnout. Ah, how well I remember perching on the lawn, anterior to the wind, my quills flapping gently in the breeze, soaking in their nightly deluge of soothing methanol. And I remember Ptarsis as we mind-linked on those tranquil nights, waiting for those last few moons to be chased away by the coming of day. We hoped to glimpse those glimmering stars before the daily ignition of the upper atmosphere.

But enough reminiscing. Let me tell you of our problem. We were an orderly yet simple world. Quite logically, we were divided into Protector and Protected. We felt a great responsibility for the Protected. In fact, we brought them here from the Other Continent so that we might better protect them. As an obviously inferior race--their tenacles are much too short--they were expected to do some necessary labor, but certainly that's not too much to ask in return for all we gave them. Yet, being considerably more populous than we were, they managed to stage a rebellion.

So war came to Parallex W. It was fought with hyper-atomics and gases of the most horrid nature. (Oxygen was used extensively.) Our farms and homes--even our beautiful Yorga trees were lost to H₂O bombs. Now our rhythmic nightly rains bring only death. The sweet, sweet methanol is tainted with H₂O; and without our nightly imbueement, we will die.

"So there's your bedtime story. Oh, the moral: Racial strife endangers life. Now go to sleep or I'll sic a Subordinate on you."

* * * *

This Terran dialogue (and thus the story-lesson) is from

The Galaxy Annals of Knowledge, 2192 A. D.
 Filing Code- Macro: Unenlightened Worlds
 Micro: Earth
 Source: Retrieved Space Capsule.