



The Bluest Eye Draft Fragments

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Pecola

9/14 12

~~THE CAT~~

See the cat. ^{it} ~~The~~ cat goes "meow meow." Come ^{and} play, ~~cat~~, Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play.

MARIE^{THA},

¶ They come from Mobile. Aiken. From Newport News. From Meridian. Add the sounds of these places in their mouths make you think of love. When you ask them where they are ^r ~~from~~ they tilt their heads and say "Mobile" and you think you've been kissed. They say "Aiken" and you see a white butterfly glance off a ~~fence~~ with a torn wing. They say "Nagadoches" and you want to say "Yes, I will." You dont know what these town^s are like but you love what happens to the air when they open their lips and let the names ease out.

¶ Meridian. ^{opens the windows of a room} The sound of it ~~hangs about~~ like the first four notes of a hymn. Few people can say the names of ~~their~~ home towns with such sly affection. Perhaps because they dont have home towns, Just places where they were born. But these girls soak up the ~~xxx~~ juice of their hometowns and it never leaves them. They are thin brown girls who ~~xxx~~ have looked long at hollyhocks in the back yards of Meridian, Mobile, Aiken and Baton Rouge. And like ~~the~~ holly hocks they are narrow, tall, and still. Their roots are deep, their stalks are firm, and only the top blossom nods in the wind. They have the eyes of people who ^{can tell} know what time it is by the color of the sky. Such girls live in quiet black neighborhoods where everybody is gainfully employed. Where there are porch swings hanging from chain^gs. Where the grass is cut with a scythe, where rooster combs and sunflowers grow in the yards ^d and pots of bleeding heart, ivy, and ^{Mother-in-law-tongue} widow's-week line the steps and window

and prophesies

sills. Such girls have bought watermelon from ^{teh} fruitmans wagon. They have put in the window the cardboard sign that has a pound measure printed on each ³edge: 10 lbs, 25 lbs; 50 lbs. ~~100 lbs~~ and NO ICE on the fourth. ~~There is~~ ^{particular} This special ~~sort of~~ ^{some of their} brown girls from Mobile ^{are} is not like her sisters. They are not ~~xxx~~ fretful, nervous, or shrill; they do not have lovely black necks that stretch as though against an invisible collar; their eyes do not bite. These ^{sugar-brown} Mobile girls move through the streets without a stir. They are ^{as} sweet and plain as buttercake. Slim ankles; long narrow feet. They wash themselves with orange colored Life bouy soap, dust themselves with Cashmere Bouquet Tacl, clean their teeth with salt on a ^epiece of rag, soften their skin with Jergen's Lotion. They smell like wood, newspapers, and vanilla. They straighten their hair with Dixie Peach and part it on the side. ^{CURL IT IN PAPER FROM BROWN BAGS} At night they wrap the curls in paper, tie a print scarf around thier heads and sleep with their hands folded across their stomachs. They do not drink, smoke, or swear and they still call sex "nookey." They sing second soprano in the choir and ^{although} ~~xxxxxxx~~ their voices are clear and steady, they are never picked to solo. They are in the second row, white blouses starched, blue skirts almost purple from ironing. ^(Insect attached) They never seem to have boy friends but they always marry. Certain men watch them, ^{meaning to,} without looking and know that if such a girl is in his house, he will sleep on sheets boiled white, hung out to dry on juniper bushes, and pressed flat with a heavy iron. There will be pretty paper flowers decorating the picture of his mother, a large Bible in the front room, and they feel secure. They know their work clothes will be mended, washed and ironed on Manday, that thier ^{SUNDAY} shirts will billow on hangers from the door jamb, stiffly starched and white. They look at her hands and know what she will do with biscuit dough; they smell the coffee

and the fried ham; see the ^{white} grits ^{soaky} boiling with a dolop of butter on top. Her hips assure them that she will bear children easily and painlessly. And they are right.

What they do not know is that this plain brown girl will build her nest stick by stick, make it her own inviolable world and stand guard over its every plant, weed, and doily, even against him. In silence will she return the lamp to where she put it in the first place; remove the dishes from the table as soon as the last bite is taken. ^{Wipe the door knob after a greasy hand has touched it} A sidelong look will be enough to tell him to smoke on the back porch. Children will sense instantly that they cannot come into her yard to retrieve a baseball. But the men do not know these things. ~~They~~ Nor do they know that she will ^{He} give her body sparingly and partially. He must enter her surreptitiously, lifting the hem of her nightgown only to her navel. He must rest his weight on his elbows when they make love, ostensibly to avoid hurting her breasts but actually to keep her from having to touch or feel too much of him.

While he moves inside her, she will wonder why they didn't put the ~~these~~ necessary but private parts of the body in some more convenient place--like the armpit for example, or the palm of the hand. Some place one could get to easily, and quickly without undressing. She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curls coming undone from the activity of love; imprints in her mind which one it is that is coming loose so she can quickly secure it once he is through. She hopes he will not sweat--the damp may get into her hair--and that she will remain dry between her legs--she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist. When she senses some spasm about to grip him she will make rapid movements with her hips, press her finger nails into his back, suck in her breath and pretend she is having an orgasm. She might wonder again, for the six hundredth time, what it would be like to

to have that feeling while her husband's penis is inside her. The ~~xxxxxx~~ closest thing to it was the time she was walking down the street and her ~~Kotex~~ napkin slipped ~~xxx~~ free of her sanitary belt. The ~~napkin~~ moved gently between her legs ~~xxx~~ as she walked. Gently, ever so gently. And then a slight and distinctly delicious sensation collected in her crotch. As the delight grew ~~xxx~~ she had to stop in the street, hold her thighs together to contain it. That must be what it is like, she thinks, but it never happens while he is inside her. When he withdraws, she pulls her nightgown down, slip^s out of the bed and into the bathroom with relief.

Occasionally some living thing will engage her affections. A cat, perhaps, who will love her order, precision, and constancy; who will be as clean and quiet as she is. The cat will settle quietly on the window sill and caress her with his eyes. She can hold him in her arms, letting his back paws struggle for footing on her breast and his forepaws cling to her shoulder. She can rub the smooth fur and feel the unresisting flesh underneath. At her gentlest touch he will preen, stretch, and open his mouth. And she will accept the strangely pleasant sensation that comes when he writhes beneath her hand and flattens his eyes with a surfeit of sensual delight. When she stands cooking at the table, he will circle about her shanks and the trill of his fur spirals up her legs to her thighs to make her fingers tremble a little in the pie dough.

Or as she sits reading ^{the} ~~xxxx~~ "Uplifting Thoughts" in The Spritual Leader, the cat will ^{jump} ~~leap~~ into her lap. She will fondle that soft hill of hair and let the warmth of the animal's body seep over and into the deeply private areas of her lap. Sometimes the magazine drops and she opens her legs just a little, and the two of them will be still together, perhaps shifting a little together, sleep^sing a little together, untill 4:00 when the intruder

Note: Change
Chucky to Junior
and Bunice to Pecora
Charles to Louis

comes home from work vaguely anxious about what's for dinner.

The cat will always know that he is first in her affections. Even after she bears a child. For she does bear a child--easily, and painlessly. But only one. A son. Named Junior.

One such girl from Mobile, or Meridian, or Aiken who did not sweat in her armpits nor between her thighs, who smelled of wood and vanilla, ^{who had been to in the made souffles in the home be dept,} moved with her husband, ^{Louis,} Charles, to Lorain, Ohio. Her name was Geraldine. There she built her nest, ironed shirts, potted bleeding hearts, played with her cat and birthed ^{Louis} Charles Junior. ~~xxxxx~~ Called Chucky.

Geraldine did not allow ^{her} baby Chucky to cry. As long as his needs were physical, she could meet them--comfort and satiety. ~~xxxxxx~~ He was always brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod. ~~xx~~ Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him, or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw ^{that} to his every other desire was fulfilled. It was not long before the child discovered the difference ^{to} between himself and the cat in his mother's behavior. ^{he} As he grew older he learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat and spent some happy moments watching it suffer. ^{the} That cat survived because Geraldine was seldom away from home and could effectively soothe the animal when ^{Junior} Chucky abused him.

Geraldine, ^{Louis} Charles, Chucky Junior and the cat lived next to the playground of ^{Washington Irving} Hawthorne Elementary School. ^{Junior} Chucky considered the playground his own, and the school children ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ coveted his freedom to sleep late, go home for lunch, and dominate the playground after school. He hated to see the ~~xxx~~ swings, slides, monkey bars and see saws empty and tried to

get kids to stick around as long as possible. White kids; His mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group: he wore white shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool, the part was etched into his hair by the barber. In winter his mother put Jergen's lotion on his face to keep the skin from becoming ashen. Even though he was light-skinned it was possible to ash. The line between colored and nigger was not always ~~xxxxxxx~~^{clear}; subtle and tell-tale signs threatened to erode it and the watch had to be constant.

~~Chuck~~^{Chuck} used to long to play with the black boys. More than anything in the world he wanted to play King of the Mountain and have them push him down the ^{mound of} dirt, and roll over him. He ~~xxxxx~~^{wanted to} feel their hardness pressing ~~xx~~ on him, smell their wild blackness, and say "Fuck you" with that lovely casualness. He wanted to sit with them on curbstones and compare the sharpness of jackknives, the distance and arcs of spitting. In the toilet he wanted to share with them the laurels of being able to ^{pe} piss far and long. Bay Boy and P.L. had at one time been his idols. Gradually he came to agree with his mother that neither Bay Boy nor P.L. were good enough for him. He even forgot to wonder why it was all right for the white boys to ~~xxx~~ play with them, but not him. He played only with Ralph Misensky who was two years younger, wore glasses and didn't want to do anything. More and more ~~Chuck~~^{Chuck} enjoyed bullying girls. It was easy making them scream and run. How he laughed when they fell down and their bloomers showed. When they got up, ~~with~~ their faces red and crinkled it made him feel good. The nigger girls he did not pick on

very much. They usually travelled in packs and once when he threw a stone at some of them, they chased ~~him~~, caught ~~him~~ and beat him. ^{witless} He lied to his mother, saying Bay Boy did it. His mother was very upset. His father just kept on reading the Lorain Journal.

When the mood struck him he would call a ^{CHILD} ~~kid~~ passing by to come play on the swings or the see-saw. If the ^{CHILD} ~~kid~~ wouldn't, or did, and left too soon, ^{Chuck} Chucky threw gravel at him. He became a very good shot.

Alternately bored and frightened at home, the playground was his joy. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ On a day when he had been especially idle, he saw a very black girl taking a short cut through the playground. She kept her head down as she walked. He had seen her many times before standing ^{he thought} alone, always alone, ~~xxxxxxx~~ at recess. Nobody ever played with her. ^{Probably because she} ~~She sure~~ was ugly. ^{so}

~~Now~~ Chucky called to her. "Hey! What are you doing walking through my yard?"

The girl stopped.

"Nobody can come through this yard less I say so."

"This ain't your yard. It's the school's."

"But I'm in charge of it."

The girl started to walk away.

"Wait." Chucky walked toward her. "You can play in it if you want to."

What's your name?"

^{Lecora} "Lunice. I don't want to play."

"Come on. I'm not going to bother you."

"I got to go home."

"Say, you want to see something? I got something to show you."

"No. What is it?"

"Come on in my house. See, I live right there. Come on. I'll show you."

"Show me what?"

"Some kittens. We got some kitten^s. You can have one if you want."

"Real kittens?"

"Yeah. Come on."

He pulled gently at her dress. ^{Pecca} Eunice began to move toward his house. When he knew she had agreed, ^{Junior} Chucky ran ahead excitedly, stopping only to yell back at her to come on. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ He held the door open for her, smiling his encouragement. Eunice climbed the porch stairs and ^{hesitated} stood there, afraid to follow him. The house looked dark. Chucky said "There's nobody here. My ma's gone out and my father's at work. Don't you want to see the kittens?"

Eunice stepped inside the door. ^{Junior} Chucky turned on the lights.

How beautiful, she thought. What a beautiful house. There was a big red and gold bible on the dining room table. Little lace doilys were every where--on arms and backs of chairs, ^{in the center of a large dining table several tables} on little ~~table~~ ^{tables}. Potted plants were on all the window sills. A color picture of Jesus Christ hung on a wall with the prettiest paper flowers ~~fix~~ fastened on the frame. She wanted to see everthing slowly, slowly. But ^{Junior} Chucky kept saying "Hey, you. Come on. Come on." He pulled her into another room, even more beautiful than the first. More doilys, a big lamp with a green and gold base and white shade. There was even a rug on the floor with enormous ~~dark~~ red flowers ~~and~~ She was deep in admiration of the flowers when ^{Junior} Chucky said "Here!" ^{Pecca} Eunice turned. "Here is your kitten?" he screeched. And he threw a big black cat right in her face. She ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ sucked in her breath in fear and surprise and felt ~~the~~ ^{the} fur in her mouth. The cat clawed her face and chest in an

effort to right itself, then ~~xxxxx~~ leaped nimbly to the floor.

Chucky was laughing and running around the room clutching his stomach delightedly. ^{When} Eunice touched the scratched place on her face and felt tears coming. She started toward the doorway, ^{Chucky} leaped in front of her.

"You can't get out. You're my prisoner," he said. His eyes were merry but hard.

^{You} "Let me go."

"No!" He pushed her down, ran ~~xx~~ out the door that ^{separated} adjoined the rooms and held it ~~xxxx~~ shut with his hands. ^{Eunice's} banging on the door increased his gasping, high-pitched laughter.

The tears came fast and she held her face in her hands. ^{When} Something soft and furry ^{moved} around her ankles. She jumped and saw it was the cat. He wound himself in and about her ~~xxx~~ legs. ^{Momentarily distracted from her fear, she} Eunice squatted down to touch him, her hands wet from the tears. ~~and~~ The cat rubbed up against her knee. He was ~~xxx~~ black all over, ^{and} deep silky black, his eyes, pointing down toward his nose, were blueish green. The light made them shine like blue ice. Eunice rubbed the cat's head; he whined, his tongue flicking with pleasure. The blue eyes in the black face held her. ^{Chucky} Chucky, curious at not hearing her sobs, opened the door, ^{and} he saw her squatting down rubbing the cat's back. He saw the cat stretching its head and flattening its eyes. He had seen that expression many times as the animal responded to his mother's touch.

"Gimme my cat!" His voice broke. With a movement both awkward and sure he snatched the cat by one of its hind legs and began to swing it around his head in a circle.

"Stop that!" ^{Eunice} Eunice was screaming. The cat's ^{free} paws were stiffened, ~~and~~ ready to grab anything to restore balance; its mouth ~~was~~ wide, its

Moon: silence

Girl: And the stars.

Stars: silence

Houses: silence

Moon: silence

Wind: sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss

Girls: I love the snow.

Snow: silence

There is much silence. Then the Wind says:

Wind: Be still or you will be eaten away by the black.

Girl: Where do all the colors go at night?

Moon: They die. They die.

Trees: I know you. You are bad.

Houses: Yes. Bad. See her crooked eyes.

Wind: Be still. Your heart is making too much noise.

Girl: I have to go. I have to run.

Moon: Why?

Girl: I want to hear my footsteps.

Wind: O, be still. Your footsteps will be eaten away by the black.

Girl: Why are you pointing at me?

Trees: Who can answer that better than you?

Moon: Leave her alone. Poor girl. Her eyes are crooked. Bold but crooked.

Houses: Yes. Bold, but crooked.

Trees: Yes, bold, but very, very crooked.

Houses: Yes. Crooked, but very, very bold.

240
160
80
30

240
240
480
240

All: laughter

Girl: I have to run. I have to hear my footsteps.

More laughter. Much, much more laughter.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH

Att: TO HE WHO GREATLY ENNOBLED HUMAN NATURE BY CREATING IT

Dear-Lord,

Dear God, (N.B. The use of the halfstop after the greeting. This is a Friendly Letter.)

Dear God: (On the contrary. This is a Business Letter!)

The purpose of this letter is to familiarize you with facts ^{which} either have escaped your notice, or which you have chosen to ignore. Doubtless there will be repetitions (for you are not altogether oblivious of this case--I understand there is something fairly accurate about "He chasteneth whom He loveth"--) but, equally doubtless, there will be new insights, new evidence and, most relevant, new developments, which, providing you are willing to suspend prejudice and rely on unequivocal, indisputable data, ought to lead you to a judgment that is both fair and just.

In the interests of scholarship-and for the efficiency of the record-keeper (no less than my love for logic) I begin ^{where} ~~at~~ you did: at the beginning.

Once upon a time I lived greenly and youngish on one of your islands. An island of the archipelago in the North Atlantic between North and South Americaⁿ, enclosing the Carribean Sea and Gulf of Mexico: divided into the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles, and the Bahama Islands. Not the Windward or Leeward Islands colonies, mark you, but within, of course, the Greater of the two Antilles. ✓

✓ While the precision of my prose may be, at times, laborious^{ous}, it is necessary that I identify myself to you clearly.

SOAPHEAD 2

In this once upon a greater time I was nonetheless a lad from these Greater Antilles. Perhaps if I'd been from the Lesser of the two Antilles, or been even a lesser lad from the Greater Antilles, I would never have been the least of little men!

Drophead 3

We, in this colony, took as our own, the most dramatic, and the ~~most~~ obvious of our white ~~leader~~^{master}'s characteristics, which were, of course, the ~~in~~ worst. In retaining the identity of our race, we held fast to those characteristics most gratifying to sustain and least troublesome to maintain. Consequently we were not royal but snobbish; not aristocratic but class conscious; we believed authority was cruelty to our inferiors, and education was schooling. We mistook violence for passion; indolence for leisure, and thought recklessness was freedom. We raised our children and reared our crops, we let infants grow and property develop. Our manhood was defined by acquisitions. Our womanhood by acquiescence. And the smell of Your fruit and labour of your days we abhorred.

Shall I tell you how little she loved me? You suspect. You could hardly know.

This morning before the little black girl came I cried -- for Velma. Oh, not aloud. There is no wind to carry, bear, or even refuse to bear, a sound so heavy with regret. But in my silent own lone way, I cried-- for Velma. Did I ever tell you how little she loved me? What am I to do with these uncried tears? Uncry? Uncry? You needs must know about Velma to understand what I did today.

She (Velma) left me the way people leave a hotel room. A hotel room is a place to be when you are doing something else. ^{of itself} It is ^{no} ~~little~~ consequence ^{to} in one's ^{major} scheme. A hotel room is convenient. But its convenience is limited to the time you need it while you are in that particular town on that particular business: you hope it is comfortable, but ^{prefer} rather that it be anonymous. It is not, after all,

soaphead insert (2) continued.

What is Man that thou art mindful of him? ^{Hast thou eyes of flesh?} Are thy days ^{as} like his ~~the~~ ^{of man} days? ~~thy flesh as his days?~~ No. You do not know what hunger can do. ~~What begging can do.~~ What is Man that thou are mindful of him? Indeed. Indeed.) And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass (only as? If we do not forgive, we are not forgiven. All right. I agree to that part.) against us. (what about those who trespass against others? I can easily forgive those who hurt me; but I cannot forgive those who harm strangers I have not known.) But lead us not (would you lead us, lead your children?) into temptaⁿtion(into temptation? What are you testing us for? Having survived the womb have we further testing to undergo? Isn't that enough? We have been born, man! You have given us life! ^{Hast thou not poured} ~~Now can you not let~~ ~~me out as much and cuddled me like cheese?~~ ~~us live it? Leave me alone.~~ Are not my days few? Cease, then and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return!) and deliver us from evil (Oh You who created Evil, deliver us from It.) Amen. ^{and you} (I should have been carried from the womb to the grave)

> Did I not weep for him that was in troubles? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?

Soaphead Insert

academic

He had been reared in a family proud of its ~~eminence~~ accomplishments and its mixed blood--in fact, they believed the former was based on the latter. Some decaying British ^{nobleman} ~~Lord~~ ^{Sir Whitcomb}, who chose to disintegrate under a sun more easeful than England's, had introduced the white strain into the family in the early 1800's. Being a gentleman by order of the King, he had done the civilized thing for his mulatto bastard--provided it with three hundred pounds sterling, to the great satisfaction of the bastard's mother who felt that fortune had smiled on her. The bastard too was grateful and regarded the hoarding of ^{this} ~~the~~ white strain given him as his life's goal. He bestowed his favors on a fifteen year old girl of similar parentage. She, like a good Victorian parody, learned from her husband all that was worth learning--to separate herself in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa; to cultivate the habits, tastes, preferences that her absent father-in-law and foolish mother-in-law would have approved.

They transferred this Anglophilia to their six children and sixteen grandchildren. Except for an occasional and unaccountable insurgent who chose a restive black, they married "up", lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features.

With the confidence born of a conviction of superiority, they performed well at schools. They were industrious, orderly, and energetic, ^{hoping to prove} ~~promising~~ beyond a doubt de Gobineau's hypothesis that "all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it." Thus, they were seldom overlooked by school masters who recommended promising students for study abroad. The men studied medicine, law, theology

and emerged repeatedly in the ^{powerless} government offices available to the native population. That they were corrupt in public and private practice, both lecherous and lascivious was considered ^{their noble right} (part of their nobility) and thoroughly enjoyed by most of the less gifted population.

As the years passed, due to the carelessness of some of the ^{Whitcomb} brothers, it became difficult to maintain their whiteness and some distant and some not so distant relatives married each other. No obviously bad effects were noticed from these ill-advised unions, but one or two old maids or gardener boys marked a weakening of faculties and a disposition toward eccentricity in some of the children. Some flaw outside the usual alcoholism and lechery. They blamed the flaw on intermarriage within the family, however, not on the original genes of the decaying lord. In any case, there were flukes. No more than in any other family to be sure, but more ~~notorious~~ dangerous because more powerful. One of them was a religious fanatic who founded his own secret sect and fathered four sons, one of whom became a school master known for the precision of his justice and the control in his violence. This school master married a sweet indolent half Chinese girl for; whom the fatigue of bearing a ^{son} was too much. She died soon after child birth. Her son, named Elihue Micha Whitcomb, provided the schoolmaster with ample opportunity to work out his theories of education, discipline, and the good life. Little Elihue learned everything ^{he needed to know} well, particularly the fine art of self-deception. He read greedily but understood selectively. choosing the bits and pieces of other men's ideas that supported whatever predilection he had at the moment. Thus he chose to remember Hamlet's abuse of Ophelia but not Christ's love of Mary Magdalene; Hamlet's frivolous politics but not Christ's serious anarchy. He noticed Gibbons acidity, but not his tolerance, Otello's love for the ~~filial~~ Desdemona, but not Iago's perverted love of Otello. The work he admired most was Dante's; ^{those} ~~the one~~ he despised most ^{well} was Dostoevsky. For all his exposure to the best minds of the Western world

he allowed only the marrowest interpretaion to touch him. He responded to his father's controlled violence by developing hard habits and a soft imagination. A hatred of and fascination with any hint of disorder or decay.

At seventeen, however, he met his Beatrice, who was three years his senior. A lovely, laughing ^{big legged} girl who worked as a clerk in a ^{Chinese} department store. Velma. So strong was her affection and zest for life, she did not eliminate the frail, sickly Elihue from it. She found his fastidiousness and complete lack of humor touching and longed to introduce him to the idea of delight. He resisted the introduction but she married him anyway, only to discover that he was suffering from and enjoying an invincible melancholy. When she learned two months into the marriage how important his melancholy was to him, that he was very interesting ^{ed} in altering her joy to a more academic gloom, that he equated love-making with cummunioin and the Holy grail, she simply left. She had not lived by the sea all those years, nor listened to the wharfmen's songs all that time, to spend her life in the soundless cave of Elihue's mind.

He never got over her desertion. She was to have been the answer to his unstated unacknowledged question--where was the life to counter the encroaching non-life? Velma was to rescue him from the non-life he ^{had} learned ^{on the flat side of} at his father's ^{butt.} knee ~~which he had elaborated into anti-life.~~ But he resisted her with such skill she was finally driven out to escape the inevitable boredom ^{produced by} in such a dainty life.

Young Elihue was saved from visible shattering by the steady hand of his father who reminded him of the family's reputation and Velma's questionable one. He then pursued his studies with more vigor than before and decided at last to ^{enter the ministry} ~~take the cloth.~~ When he was advised that he had no avocation, he

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and end to the ~~xxxxx~~ animal's misery and bought some poison ^{with which} to do it ~~with~~. Only the horror of having to go near him had prevented Soaphead from completing his mission. *He wanted for rage or blinding revulsion to spare him.*

Living there among his worn things, rising early every morning from dreamless sleeps, he counseled those who sought his advice.

His business was dread. People came to him in dread; whispered in dread, wept and pleaded in dread, And dread was what he counselled.

Singly they found their way to his door, wrapped each in a shroud stitched with anger, ~~yearning~~, pride, vengeance, loneliness, misery, defeat, and hunger. They asked for the simplest of things: love, health, and money. Make him love me. Tell me what this dream means. Help me get rid of this woman. Make my mother give me back my clothes. Stop my left hand from shaking. ~~Keep~~ my baby's ghost off the stove. Break so and so's fix. To all of these requests he addressed himself. His practice was to do what he was bid--not to ^{suggest to} ~~counsel~~ the party that perhaps the request was unfair, mean, or hopeless.

With only ~~occasional~~, and increasingly rare, encounters with the little girls he could persuade to be entertained by him, he lived rather peaceably among ~~this~~ things admitting to no regrets. He was aware, of course, that something was awry in his life, and all lives, but put the problem where it belonged, at the foot of the Originator of Life. He believed that since ~~all~~ decay, vice, filth, disorder ^{were} ~~was~~ pervasive, ^{they} ~~it~~ must be in the Nature of Things. Evil existed because God had created it. He, God, had made a sloven and unforgivable error in judgment: designing an imperfect universe. Theologians justified the presence of corruption as a means by which men strove, were tested, and triumphed. ^{A triumph of cosmic neatness.} ~~Thus it was cosmically neat.~~ But this neatness, the neatness of Dante, was in the orderly pectioning and segregating of all levels of evil and decay. In the world it was not so. The most exquisite looking lady ^{ies} sat on toilets, and the most dreadful looking

had pure and holy yearnings. God had done a poor job and Soaphead ^{suspected} knew that he himself could have done better. It was in fact a pity that The Maker had not ⁺sought his counsel.

Soaphead was reflecting once again on these thoughts one late hot afternoon when he heard a tap on his door. Opening ~~the~~ ^{it} door, he saw a little girl, quite unknown to him. She was about twelve or so he thought, and seem^d to him pitifully unattractive. When he asked her what she wanted she did not answer but held out to him one of his cards advertising his gifts and services. "If you are ^overcome with trouble and ^dcontions that are not natural, I can remove them; Overcome Spells, Bad Luck and Evil Influences. Remember, I am a true Spiritualist⁺ and Psychic Reader***** Born with power and I will ^help you. Satisfaction in ^one visit. During many years of practice I have brought together many in marriage and reunited many who were ^aseparted. If you are unhappy, discouraged, or in distress, I can help you. Does bad luck seem to follow you? Has the one you love changed? I can tell you why. I will tell you who your enemies and friends are and if the one you love is true ^of false. If you are sick I can show you the way to health. I locate lost and stolen articles. Satisfaction guaranteed."

Soaphead Church told her to come in.

"What can I do for you, my child?"

She stood there, her hands folded across her stomach, a little protuding pot of a tummy. "Maybe. Maybe you can do it for me."

Do what for you?"

"I caint go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me."

"Help you how? Tell me. Dont be frightened."

My eyes.

What about your eyes

I want them blue.

and set his tongue stroke a solid line.
Soaphead pursed his lips. He thought it was at once the most fantastic and the most logical petition he had ever received. Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty. A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. Of all the wishes people had brought him, money, love, revenge, this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment. A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. His outrage grew and felt like power. For the first time he honestly wished he could work miracles. Never before had he really wanted the true and holy power--only the power to make others believe he had it. It seemed so sad, so ~~foivm~~lous that mere mortality, not judgment, kept him from it. Or did it?

With a trembling hand he made the sign of the ~~cross~~ *cross* over her. His flesh crawled; ~~and~~ in that hot dim little room of worn things, he was chilled.

"I can do nothing for you, my child. I am not a magician. I work only through the Lord. He sometimes uses me to help people. All I can do is offer myself to Him as the instrument through which he works. If He wants your wish granted he will do it."

Soaphead walked to the window, his back to the girl. His mind raced, stumbled, and ~~raced~~ *again*. How to frame the next sentence? how to hang on to this feeling of power. His eye fell on old Bob sleeping on the porch.

"We must make ah, some offering, that is, some contact with Nature. Perhaps some simple creature might be the vehicle through which He will speak. Let us see."

He knelt down at the window, and moved ~~his~~ *his* lips. After ~~xx~~ what seemed a suitable length of time, he rose and went ~~into~~ to the icebox that stood near the other window. From it he removed a small packet wrapped in pinkish butcher paper. From a shelf he took a small brown bottle and sprinkled some ~~of~~ its contents

on the substance inside the paper. He put the packet, partly opened, on the table.

"Take this food and give it to the creature sleeping on the porch.. Make sure he eats it. ^{And} Mark well how he behaves. If nothing happens you will know, that God has refused you. If the animal^h behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one.

The^g girl picks up the packet; the odor of the dark, sticky meat^t made her want to vomit. She puts a hand on her stomach.

"Courage. Courage, my child. These things are not granted to faint hearts."

She nods and swallows^v, visibly ~~xxxxxxxx~~ holding down the vomit. Soaphead opens the door and she steps over the threshold.

"Good bye, God Bless^g," he said and quickly shut the door. At the ~~door~~

^{worn}
window he stood watching her, his eyebrows pulled together into waves of compassion, his tongue fondling the gold in his upper jaw. He sees the girl bending down to the sleeping dog, who, at her touch, opens one liquid eye, matted in the corners with what looked like green glue. She reaches out and touches the dog's head, stroking him gently. The dog closes the eye, a peaceful rumble comes from somewhere inside him. She places the meat on the floor of the porch, near his nose. The odor rouses him; he lifts his head, and gets up to smell it better. He ^{eats} ~~swallows~~ it in three or four gulps. The girl strokes his head again and the dog looks up at her with soft triangle eyes. Suddenly he coughs, the cough of a phlegmy old man--and gets to his feet. The girl jumps. The dog is gagging; his mouth chomping the air and promptly falls down. He tries to raise himself, cannot, tries again and half falls down the steps. Choking, stumbling he moves like a broken toy around the yard. The girl's mouth is open, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ a little petal of tongue sbwing. She makes a wild pointless gesture with one hand and then covers her mouth with both hands. She is trying not to vomit. The dog falls again, spasm jerking his body. Then he is quiet. The girl's hands are covering her mouth, backs away a few feet, then turns, runs ~~away~~

out of the yard and down the walk.

Soaphead Church goes to the table. He sits down with folded hands
balancing his forehead on the balls of his thumbs. Then he goes to a
tiny night table with a drawer from which he takes paper a fountain pen.
A bottle of ink ~~is~~ on the same shelf that held the poison. With these
things he sits again at the table a. Slowly, ~~carefully, taking great care~~
his penmanship, he writes the following letter.

⑦ Salt sweet. Like not quite ripe strawberries covered with the light salt sweat of running days and hopping skipping jumping hours.

one day at a time.

Is it good to them that thou
~~Do you like being begged?~~ Or just lest we forget?
sharest oppressor?

You remember, do You, how and of what we are made? Let me tell
you now about the breasts of little girls. Consider, dear Love, ^{Velma} ~~point~~
~~number one~~ and the Greater Antilles--how could I have not loved them?
How they beckoned. But I apologize, formally, for whatever it is nec-
essary to apologize for in that area. (What is the area anyway--Sodomy?)
I apologize for the inappropriateness (is that it?), the imbalance of
loving them at awkward times of day, and in awkward places, and the
tastelessness of loving those ^h wick belonged to members of my family.

So I have to apologize for loving strangers?

Pecola
Younger than both Frieda and ~~E.~~, I had not yet arrived at the turning point ~~xxxxxxx~~ in the development of ~~the~~ ^{my} psyche in which would allow me to love her. What I felt at that time was unsullied hatred. But before that I had felt a stranger, more frightening thing than hatred for all the Shirley Temples of the world.

the gift
It had begun with Christmas and dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big ^bblue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. I was bemused, ~~with~~ the thing itself, and the way it looked. What was I supposed to do with it? Pretend I was its mother? I had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in humans my own age and size, and could not generate any enthusiasm at the prospect of being a mother. Motherhood was old age, and other remote possibilities. I learned quickly, however, ~~what~~ I was expected to do with the doll: rock it, fabricate storied situations around it, even sleep with it. Picture books were full of little girls sleeping with their dolls. Raggedy Ann Dolls usually, but they were out of the question. I was physically revolted by and secretly frightend of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orange ^{under the tree} worms hair. Happily no one ever put that grotesque dotted faced doll in my hands. The other dolls, which were supposed to bring me great pleasure succeeded in doing quite the opposite. When I took it to bed, its hard unyielding limbs ^{resisted} punched my flesh--the tapered finger-tips on those dimpled hands scratched. If, in sleep, I turned, the bone cold head collided with my own. It was a most uncomfortable ^{patently aggressive} sleeping companion. To hold it was no more re-warding. the ^{starched} gauze or lace on the cotton dress irritated any embrace. I had only one desire: to dis-member it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but

apparently
only me. Adults, older girls, shops, *magazines* *newspapers* *signs* signs--all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed yellow haired pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. "Here," they said "This is beautiful, and *if* since you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it." I fingered the face wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the ~~two~~ pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glass blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound--a sound they said was the sweet and plaintive cry "Mama." but which sounded to me like the bleat of a dying lamb, or, more precisely, *give* the ice-box door opening on ~~its~~ *rusty* hinges in July. Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still, *take* take off the head, shake out the sawdust, Ahhhhh. Crack the back against the brass bed rail it would bleat still. The gauze back would split and I could see the disc with six holes, the secret of the *sound* ~~bleat~~. A mere metal roundness, ~~could make that awful sound.~~

Grown people frowned and fussed: "You don't know how to take care of nothing. I never had a Babbly doll in my whole life, and used to cry my eyes out for them. Now you got one a beautiful one and you tear it up what's the matter with you?"

How strong ^{was} their outrage, tears threatend to erase ^{the aloofness of} their ~~aloof~~ authority. The emotion of years of unfulfilled longing preend in their voices. I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I did know ~~first~~ that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas. ~~I was to learn later the kinds of things to ask for.~~ But had any adults with the power to fulfill my desires taken me seriously and asked me what I wanted they would have known that I

did not want to have anything ^{to} own or possess any object. I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been "Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?" I could have spoken up, "I want to sit on the low stool in ^{BIG MAMA'S} ~~my grandmother's~~ kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone." The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of ^{BIG} ~~my grand~~ ^{Mama's} ~~mother's~~ kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music and, since it would be good to have all of my ~~senses~~ ^{the taste of} engaged, to eat a peach, perhaps, afterwards.

Instead I tasted and smelled the acridness of tin plates and cups designed for tea parties that bored me. ~~Instead I destroyed white baby dolls.~~ Instead I looked with loathing on new dresses that required a hateful bath in a galvanized zinc tub before wearing. Slipping around on the zinc, no time to play or soak, for the water chilled too fast, no time to enjoy one's nakedness, only time to make curtains of soapy water careen down between the legs. Then the scratchy ~~towels~~ and the dreadful and humiliating absence of dirt. The irritable, unimaginative cleanliness. Gone the ~~soil~~ ^{pattern} under my nails, gone the dirt ~~streaks~~ from my arms, gone the ink marks from legs and face, all my creations and accumulations of the day gone, and replaced by goose pimples.

~~Tr. When bathed and dressed and thoroughly uncomfortable I could pose with my doll.~~ ^{If I destroyed white baby dolls.}

But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls. The indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say awwwww ^{but} and not do that for me. There ~~was~~ ~~no~~ ~~eye~~ ~~slide~~ of black women

as they approached them on the street, ^{and the possessive gentleness of} ~~or the posseiveness in their grip~~ ^{their touch as they handled them}
~~when they walked in no.~~

If I pinched them there ⁱⁿ eyes--unlike the crazed glint of the baby doll's eyes, [^] would fold in pain and their cry would not be the sound of an ice-box door, but a fascinating cry of pain. When I learned how repulsive this ^{that it was repulsive because I was disinterested} disinterested violence was my shame floundered [^] for some refuge. The best [^] hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from [^] pristine sadism, to fabricated [^] hated, to fraudulent love. It was a small step to Shirley Temple. I learned [^] later to worship her, ^{just as} and I learned to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learned that [^] the change was adjustment without improvement.

" 3 gts of milk —————

(To follow Mr. Shelby's entrance)
and before "Here is the house..."

She slept in the bed with us. Frieda on the outside because she is brave--it never occurs to her that if in her sleep her hand hangs over the edge of the bed "something" will crawl out from under it and bite her fingers off. I sleep near the wall because that thought has occurred to me. ^{Pocola} Eunice, therefore, had to sleep in the middle.

Mama had told us two days ^Rearlier that a "case" was coming--a girl who had no place to go. The ^g"county" ^dhad placed her in our house for a few days until they could decide what to do, or, more precisely, until the family was re-united. We were to be nice to her and not fight. Mama didn't know "what got into people" but that old Dog ^{Breedlove} Winder had burnt up his house, gone upside his wife's head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors.

Outdoors, we knew, was the real terro^R of life. The threat of being outdoors surfeited frequently in those days. Every possibility of excess was curtailed with it. If somebody ate too much he could end up outdoors. If somebody ~~used~~ used too much coal he could end up outdoors. People could gamble themselves outdoors, drink themselves outdoors. Sometimes mothers put their sons outdoors, and when that happend, "regardless of what the son had done, all sympathy was ~~xx~~ with him. He was outdoors, and his own flesh had done it. To be put outdoors by a landlord was one thing--unfortunate, but an aspect of life over which you had no control (^{since you} ^{not} who could control his income?). But to be slack enough to put oneself outdoors, or heartless enough to put one's own kin outdoors --that was criminal.

There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors.

If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, ^{ing} It defined and complemented ^{ing} our metaphysical condition. Being a minority in both caste and class we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment. Our peripheral existence, however was something we had learned to deal with--probably because it was abstract. But the concreteness of being outdoors was another matter--like the difference between the concept of death and being, in fact, dead. Dead doesn't change and outdoors is here to stay.

Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership. The firm possession of a yard, a porch, a grape arbor. Propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love on their nests. Like frenzied, desperate birds they over-decorated everything, fussed and fidgeted over their hard-won homes, canned, jellied, and preserved all summer to fill their cupboards and shelves; they painted, picked, and poked at every corner of their houses. And these houses loomed like hot-house sunflowers among the rows of weeds that were the rented houses. Renting blacks cast furtive glances ^{at} these owned yards, ^{and} porches, and made firmer commitments to buy themselves "some nice little old place." In the meantime, they saved, and scratched, and piled away what they could in the rented hovels looking forward to the day of property.

Holly Bredone
-Old Winder, then, a renting black, having put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger. *Bredone* Mrs. Winder was staying with the woman she worked for, the boy, Sammy, was with some

d

other family, and ^{Pecola} Eunice was to stay with us. Cholly was in jail.

She came with nothing. No little paper bag with the other dress, or a night gown, or two pair of white-ish cotton bloomers. She just appeared with a white woman and sat down.

⑤ When we discoveredd that she clearly did not want to dominate us, we liked her. She laughed when I clowned for her and ~~tried to be witty.~~ She smiled and accepted gracefully the food gifts my sister gave her.

"Would you like some graham crackers?"

"I don't care."

Frieda brought her four graham crackers on a saucer and some milk in a blue and white Shirley Temple cup. She was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face. Frieda and she had a loving conversation about how ~~xxx~~ cu-ute Shirley Temple was. I couldn't join them in their ~~xxx~~ adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bo Jangles who was ^{my} friend, ^{it} my uncle, my daddy and who ought to have been soft-shoeing/and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels. So I said, "I like Jane Withers."

They ^{GAVE} ~~gave~~ me a puzzled look, decided I was incomprehensible, and continued ther reminiscing about old squint-eyed Shirley.

We had fun in those few days ^{Pecola} Eunice was with us. Frieda and I stopped fighting each other and concentrated on our guest trying hard to keep her from feeling outdoors.

"Three quarts of milk. That's what was in that ice box yeaterday.

Three whole quarts. Now they aint none. Not a drop. I dont mind folks

Insert attached.

to insert
attached

42 #

coming in getting what they want, but three quarts of milk! What the devil does anybody need with three quarts of milk?"

The "folks" my mother was referring to was ^{Pecola} Eunice. The three of us, ^{Pecola} Eunice, Frieda and I, listened to her downstairs in the kitchen fussing/ about the amount of milk ^{Pecola} Eunice had drunk. We knew ^{she} Eunice was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle it and see sweet Shirley's face. My mother knew that Frieda and I hated milk and assumed ^{Pecola} Eunice drank it out of greediness. It was certainly not for us to "dispute" her. We didn't initiate talk with grown ups; we answered their questions.

Ashamed of the insults that were being heaped on our friend, we just sat there: I picked toe jam, Frieda cleaned her fingernails with her teeth, and ^{Pecola} Eunice finger-traced some scars on her knee--her head cocked to one side. My mother's fussing ^{SOLILOQUIES} ~~siloquies~~ always irritated and depressed^s us. They were interminable, insulting, and , although indirect, (Mama never named anybody--just talked about folks and some people) extremely painful in their thrust. She would go on like that for hours connecting one offense to another until all of the things that chagrined her were spewed out. Then, having told everybody^d and everything off, she would burst into song and sing the rest of the day. But it was such a long time before the singing^g part came. In the meantime, our stomachs jellying and our necks burning, we listened, avoided each others eyes, and picked toe jam or whatever.

"...I don't know what I'm supposed to be running here, a charity ward, I guess. Time for me to get out of the giving line and get in the getting line. I guess I aint supposed to have nothing. I'm supposed to end up in the poor house. Look like nothing I do is going to keep me out of there. Folks just spend all their time trying to figure out ways to send me to the poor

house. I got about as much business with another mouth to feed as a cat~~s~~ has with side pockets. As if I dont have trouble enough trying to feed my ^{OWN} ~~own~~ and keep out the poor house, now I got something ~~xx~~ else in here that's just going to drink me on in there. Well, naw, she aint. Not long as I got strength in my body and a tongue in my head. There's a limit to everything. I aint got nothing to just throw away. Don't nobody need three quarts of milk. Henry Ford don't need three quarts of milk. That's just downright sinful. I'm willing to do what I can for folks. Cant nobody say I aint. But this has got to stop, and I'm just the one to stop it. Bible say watch as well as pray. Folks just dump they children off on you and go on bout they business. Aint nobody even peeped in here to see whether that child has a loaf of bread. Look like they would just peep in ^{to give her} to see whether I had a loaf of bread. But naw. That thought dont cross they mind. That old trifling Cholly been out of jail two whole days and aint been here yet to see if his own child was 'live or dead. She could be dead for all he know. And that mama neither. What kind of something is ~~y~~that?"

When mama got around to Henry Ford and all those people who didn't care whether she had ^a "a loaf of bread," it was time to go. We wanted to miss the part about Roosevelt and the CCC camps.

Frieda got up and started down the stairs. ^{Frieda} Eunice and I followed, making a wide arc to avoid the kitchen doorway. We sat on the steps of the porch where my mother's words could reach us only in spurts.

It was a lonesome Saturday. The house smelled of Fels Naptha and the ^{sharp} ~~sharp~~ odor of mustard greens cooking. Saturdays always ~~seemed to be~~ ^{seemed} ~~lonesome~~ ^{were} lonesome,

fussy, soapy days. Second in misery only to those tight, ~~starch~~ starchy, cough drop Sundays, so full of "dents" and "set'cha self down's."

If my mother was in a singing mood it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and-left-me times. But her voice was so sweet and her singing-eyes so melty I found myself longing for those hard times, yearning to be grown without "a thin di-i-ime to my name." I looked forward to the delicious time when "my man" would leave me, When I would "hate to see that evening sun go down.." cause then I would know "my man has left this town." ~~All of that misery~~ ^{to} colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice. ~~It~~ ^{It} took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that ^{pain} ~~apain~~ was not only endurable, it was sweet.

But without song, those Saturdays sat on my head like a coal skuttle, and if mama was fussing, as she was now, it was like somebody throwing stones at it.

"...and here I am poor as a bowl of yak-me. What do they think I am? Some kind of Sandy Claus? Well, they can just take they stocking down cause it she aint Christmas..."

We fidgeted.

"Let's do something," Frieda said.

"What you want to do?" I asked.

"I dont know. Nothing." Frieda stared at the tops of the trees. ^{Secala} Eunice looked at her feet.

"You want to go up to Mr. ^{Henry's} Shelby's room and look at his magazines?"

Frieda ~~made~~ made an ugly face. She didn't like to look at dirty pictures.

"Well," I continued, " we could look at his bible. That's pretty."

Frieda sucked her teeth and made a phttt sound with her lips.

"OK, then. We could go thread needles for the half-blind lady. She'll give us a penny."

Frieda snorted. "Her eyes look like snot. ^{Pecola} I dont feel like looking at them. What you want to do ~~Eunice~~?"

"I dont care" she said. "Anything you want."

I had another idea. "We could go up the alley and see what's in the trash cans."

"Too cold," said Frieda. She was bored andd irritable.

"I know. we could make some fudge."

"You kidding? With mama in there ~~am~~ fussing? When she starts fussing at tge walls, yo~~w~~ know she's gonna be at it all day. She wouldn't even let us."

"Well let's go over the the Greek Hotel and listen to them cuss."

"Oh who wants to do that? Besides thy say the same old words all the time."

My supply of ideas exhausted, I began to concentrate on the white spots on my fingernails. The total signified the number of boy friends I would have. Seven.

Mama's sililoquy slid into the silence"...Bible say feed the hungry. That's fine. That's all right. But I aint feeding no elephants..Anybody need three quarts of milk to live need to get out of here. They in the wrong place. What is this? Some kind of dairy farm?"

Suddenly ^{Pecola} ~~Eunice~~ bolted straight up, Her eyss wide with terror. A whinnying sound came from her mouth.

"What's the matter with you?" Frieda stood up too.

Then we both looked where ^{Pecola} ~~Eunice~~ was staring. Blood was running down her legs. Some drops were on the steps. I leaped up. "Hey. You

cut yourself? Look. It's all over your dress."

A brownish red stain discolored the back of her dress.

She kept whinnying, standing with her legs far apart.

Frieda said, "Oh. Lordy!! I know. I know what that is!"

"What?" ^{Pecala's} Eunice's fingers went to her mouth.

"That's ministratin."

"What's that?"

"You know."

"Am I going to die?" she ^s asked.

"Noooo. You wont die. It just means you can have a baby!"

"What?"

"How do you know?" I was sick and tired of Frieda knowing everything.

"Mildred told me, and mama too."

"I dont believe it."

"You dont have to dummy. Look. Wait here. Sit down ^{Pecala} Eunice. Right here." Frieda was all authority and zest. "And you," she said to me, "you go get some water."

"Water?"

"Yes, stupid. Water. And be quiet or mama will hear you."

^{Pecala} Eunice sat down again, a little less fear in her eyes. I went into the kitchen.

"What you want, girl?" Mama was rinsing curtains in the sink.

"Some water, ma'am."

"Right where I'm working, naturally. Well get a glass. Not no clean one neither. Use that jar."

I got a mason jar and filled it with water from the faucet. It seemed a long time filling.

"Dont nobody never want nothing till they see me at the sink. Then everybody got to drink water..."

When
The jar ^{was} full, I moved to leave the room.

"Where you going?"

"Outside."

"Drink that water right here!"

"I aint gonna break nothing."

"You dont know what you gonna do."

"Yes ma'am. I do. Lemme take it out. I won't spill none."

"You bed' not."

I got to the porch and stood there with the mason jar of water. *Pecola*
~~Eunice~~
was crying.

"What you crying for? Does it hurt?"

She shook her head.

"Then stop slinging snot."

Frieda opened the back door. She had something tucked in her blouse. She looked at me in amazement and pointed to the jar. "What's that supposed to do?"

"You told me. You said get some water."

"Not a little old jar full. Lots of water. To scrub the steps with, dumbbell!"

"How was I supposed to know?"

"Yeah. How was you. Come on!" *Pecola*
She pulled ~~Eunice~~ up by the arm.

"Let's go back here." They headed for the side of the house where the bushes were thick.

"Hey. What about me? I want to go."

"Shut uuuuup," Frieda stage whispered. "Mama will hear you. You wash

the steps."

They disappeared around the corner of the house.

I was going to miss something. Again. Here was something important and I had to stay behind and not see any of it. I poured the water on the steps, sloshed it with my shoe and ran to join them.

Frieda was on her knees, a white rectangle of cotton was near her on the ground. She was pulling ^{Rosemary's} Eunice's pants off. "Come on. Step out of them." She managed to get the soiled pants down and flung them at me. "Here."

"What am I supposed to do with these?"

"Bury them, moron."

Frieda told ^{Rosemary} Eunice to hold the cotton thing between her legs.

"How's she gonna walk like that?" I asked.

Frieda didn't answer. Instead she took two safety pins from the hem of her skirt and began to pin the ends of the napkin to ^{Rosemary's} Eunice's dress.

I picked up the pants with two fingers and looked about for something to dig a hole with. A rustling noise in the bushes startled me, and, ~~xx~~ turning toward it, saw a pair of fascinated eyes in a dough-white face. Rosemary. She was watching us. I grabbed for her face and succeeded in scratching her nose. She screamed and jumped back.

"Mrs. MacTeer! Mrs. MacTeer!" Rosemary hollered. "Frieda and Claudia are out here playing nasty! Mrs. Mac Teer!"

Mama opened the window and looked down at us.

"What?"

"They're playing nasty, Mrs. Mac Teer. Look. and Claudia ~~h~~ me cause I seen them!"

Mama slammed the window shut and came running out the back door.

"What you all doing? Oh. Uh huh. Uh huh. Playing nasty, huh?" She

reached into the bushes and pulled off a switch. "I'd rather raise pigs than some nasty girls. Least I can slaughter them!"

We began to shriek. "No, mama. No ma'am. We wasn't! She's a liar! No Ma'am, mama! No ma'am, mama!"

Mama grabbed Frieda by the shoulder, turned her around and gave her three or four stinging cuts ~~with the switch~~ on her legs. "Gonna be nasty, huh? Naw you aint!"

Frieda was destroyed. Whippings wounded and insulted her.

Mama looked at ^{Pecola}Eunice. "You too!" she said, "Child of mine or not!" She grabbed ^{Pecola}Eunice and spun her around. The safety pin snapped open on one end of the napkin and mama saw it fall from under her dress. The switch hovered in the air while mama blinked. "What the devil is going on here?"

Frieda was sobbing. I, next in line, began to explain. "She was bleeding. We was just trying to stop the blood!"

Mama looked at Frieda for verification. Frieda nodded, "She's ministratin. We was just helping."

Mama released ^{Pecola}Eunice and stood ~~in~~ looking at her. Then she pulled both of them toward her, their heads against her stomach. Her eyes were sorry. ^{PLEASE DON'T DISTURB}"OK. OK. Now stop crying. I didn't know. Come on now. Get on in the house. Go on home, Rosemary. The show is over."

We trooped in, Frieda sobbing quietly, ^{Pecola}Eunice carrying a white tail, me carrying the little-girl-gone-to-woman pants.

Mama led us to the bathroom. She prodded Eunice inside and, taking the underwear from me, told us to stay out.

We could hear water running into the bath⁺tub.

"You think she's going to drown her?"

"Oh, Claudia. You so dumb. She's just going to wash her clothes and all."

"Should we beat up Rosemary?"

"No. Leave ~~her~~ alone."

The water gushed and over its gushing we could hear the music of ~~mm~~
my mother's slaughter.

That night, in bed, the three of us lay still. We were full of awe
and respect for ^{Pecala} Eunice. Lying next to a real person who was really ministratin
was somehow sacred. She was different from us now--grown up like. She, her-
self, felt the distance, but refused to lord it over us.

After a long while she spoke very softly.

"Is it true that I can have a baby now?"

"Sure, " ^{said} Frieda drowsily. "Sure you can. "

"But...how?" Her voice was hollow with wonder.

"Oh," said Frieda, "Somebody has to love you."

"Oh."

There was ^a ~~another~~ long pause in which ^{Pecala and I} ~~we both~~ thought this over. It
would involve, I supposed, "my man" who, before leaving me, would love me.
But there weren't any babies in the songs ^{my} mother sang. Maybe that's
why the women were sad: the men left before they could make a baby.

^{Pecala} Then Eunice asked a question that had never entered my mind.

"How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?"

But Frieda was asleep. And I didnt know.

They go to land grant colleges, normal schools, and learn ~~thexrix~~ how to do the white man's work with refinement: ~~hwxxtax~~ home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. Here they learn the rest of the lesson begun in those soft houses with proch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to ~~gxixrixfxthxrxfxnk~~ behave, ~~hwxxtaxdwxrx~~. The careful development of thrift patience high morals and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful ~~fnkxthxrxwx~~ passion, funkiness of funkiness of funkiness of the wide range of human emotions. the ~~fnkxthxrxwx~~ nature, the funk that was

Where ever it erupts, they wipe it away; where it crusts they dissolve it, wherever it drips, flowers or ~~clung~~ ^{clung} they ~~found~~ ^{find} it and ~~fought~~ ^{fight} it until it dies. ~~It was a battle they fought~~ ^{They were right this battle} all the way to the grave. The laugh a little too loud; the enunciation a little too round; ~~the~~ ^{the gesture a little too generous.} They hold their behind in ~~texkwxpx~~ for fear of a ~~sway~~ ^{sway} too free; ~~thxrx~~ ^{when} if they ~~wear~~ ^{wear} lipstick, they never cover ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~fnkxthxrx~~ ^{entire mouth} for fear of have too thick lips and worry ~~worry~~ ^{the} worry about the edges of their hair ~~lines~~.

Standing at the door of her car, key in hand, Joanna glanced at the sky. The moon. There it was like an old pearl. A Piece of jewelry, ~~for her~~. She smiled. An old pearl to wear on my back wool dress. A lovely jewel to crown her victory. Those were nice words: jewel, crown, victory. There was ~~no~~ tension, no Anguish now, in her stomach. She felt relief and a sense of belonging.

At last, she thought. One something done. One somebody in a heap of nobodes saved. And by me. That was what was meant by "the/^{subjective}reward of objective accomplishment."

The wind could tear at her back all it liked. She would wear the moon ~~but/~~
~~yet/left/breast~~ on her black wool dress. Right over her left breast.

It was autumn^{too} when Mr. Shelby came. Our roomer. Our roomer. The words ballooned from the lips and hovered about our heads--silent, separate, and pleasantly mysterious. My mother was all ease and satisfaction in discussing his coming.

"You know him," she said to her friends. "Shelby Robinson. He's been living over there with Miss Della Jones on 13th Street. But she's too addled now to keep up. So he's looking for another place."

"Oh yes." Her friends do not hide their curiosity. "I been wondering how long he was going to stay up there with her. They say she's real bad off. Don't know who he is half the time and nobody else."

"Well that old crazy nigger she married up with didn't help her head none."

"Did you hear what he told folks when he left her?"

"Uh uh. What?"

"Well he run off with that trifling Peggy--from Elyria. You know."

"One of Old Slack Bessie's girls?"

"That's the one. Well somebody asked him why he left a nice good church woman like Della for that heifer. You know Della always did keep a good house. And he said the honest to God real reason was he couldn't take no more of that violet water Della Jones used. Said he wanted a woman to smell like a woman. Said Della was just too clean for him"

"Old dog. Ain't that nasty!"

"You telling me. What kind of reasoning is that?"

"No king. Some men just dogs."

"Is that what give her them strokes?"

"Must have helped. But you know none of them girls wasn't too bright. Remember that grinning Hattie? She wasn't never right. And their Auntie

Julia is till trotting up and down 16th Street talking to herself."

"Didn't she get put away?"

"Naw. County wouldn't take her. Said she wasn't harming anybody."

"Well she's harming me. You want something to scare the living shit out of you, you get up at 5:30 in the morning like I do and see that old hag floating by in that bonnet. Have mercy!"

They laugh.

Frieda and I are washing jars for canning. We do not hear their words, but with grown ups we listen to and watch out for their voices.

"Well I hope don't nobody let me roam around like that when I get senile. It's a shame."

"What they going to do about Della? Don't she have no people?"

"A Sister's coming up from North Caralina to look after her. I expect she wants to get aholt of Della's house."

"Oh come on. That's a evil thought if ever I heard one."

"What you want to bet? Shelby said that sister aint seen Della in fifteen years."

"I kind of thought Shelby would marry her one of these days."

"That old woman?"

"Well Shelby ain't no chicken."

"No but he ain't a buzzard eibher."

"He ever been married to anybody?"

"No."

"How come? Somebody cut it off?"

"He's just picky."

"He ain't picky. You see anything around her^e you'd marry?"

"Well ... no."

"He's just sensible. A steady worker with quiet ways. I hope it works out all right."

"It will. How much you charging?"

"Five dollars every two weeks."

"That'll be a big help to you."

"I'll say."

†
^ Their conversation is like a gently wicked dance: sound meets sound, curseys, shimmies, and retires. Another sound enters but is upstaged by still another: the two circle each other and stop. Sometimes their words move in lofty spirals; other times they take strident leaps, and all of it is punctuated with warm-pulsed laughter--like the throb of a heart made of jelly. The edge, the curl, the thrust of their emotions is always clear to Frieda and I. We do not, can not, know the meanings of all their words for we are nine and ten years old. So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timbre.

I think the antennae of all children are alike in that way. And we lose this sensitivity without knowing what we have lost or when: a pre-syllabic awareness of the drift and meaning of sound.

So when Mr. Shelby arrived on a Saturday night we smelled him. He smelled wonderful. Like trees and lemon vanishing cream, and Nu Nile Hair Oil and flecks of Sen-Sen.

Mr. Shelby smiled a lot showing small even teeth with a friendly gap in the middle. Frieda and I were not introduced to him--merely pointed out. Like, here is the bathroom; the clothes closet is here; and these are my kids,

Frieda and Claudia; watch out for this window; it don't open all the way.

We⁴ looked sideways at him saying nothing and expecting him to say nothing. Just to nod as he had done at the clothes closet, acknowledging our existence. To our surprise he spoke to us.

"Hello there. You must be Greta Garbo, and you must be Shirley Temple."

We giggled. Even my father was startled into a smile.

"Want a penny?" He held out a shiny coin to us. Frieda dropped her head, too pleased to answer. I reached for it. He snapped his thumb and forefinger and the penny disappeared. Our shock was laced with delight. We searched all over him, poking our fingers into his socks, looking up the inside back of his coat. If happiness is anticipation with certainty, we were happy. And while we waited for the coin to reappear, we knew we were amusing Mama and Daddy. Daddy was smiling, and Mama's eyes went soft as they followed our hands wandering over Mr. Shelby's body.

We loved him. Even after what came later, there was no bitterness in our memory of him.

first
meeting of
Frieda + Claudia
with Ennis

summer

I had lain alone for a long time in the tall grass watching the witch's house and squeezing the white foul liquid from the stalks of milkweed. Summer lay like a heavy hand on the back of my neck and took away all energy except that required to think long and shapeless thoughts. Sticky and hot I came home knowing some punishment was in store for me. There was none. The house was quiet with a tension that was occasionally refueled by quick bursts of harrangue by my mother. She walked about in her high heels—her hat, which she seldom took off, still on her head—doing household chores in a most disorganized fashion. She swept the porch then put a pot of water on to boil. She ironed one yellow curtain panel and ^{then} hosed down the porch. She went into the garden and picked three tomatoes and put them on the window sill in the kitchen—then she swept the porch again. All the time alternating between a festering silence and angry abuse, most of which I could not understand. A neighbor lady came in and sat down, without a word, by the door. Filling her bottom lip with acrid snuff from time to time, she listened to my mother's chanting fury and nodded agreement.

From what I could gather, my father had thrown a tricycle at Mr. Shelby's head—or thrown him down the stairs and then the tricycle after

him which struck his head. Anyway, Mr. Shelby was gone. I peeped into his room. Except for the odor of lemon vanishing cream, nothing of him was there.

I followed my mother into the backyard and watched her catch a white hen. After knocking it senseless ~~on the fence post~~, she wrung its neck, chopped off the head and ~~tossed it on the ground~~. The chicken shivered and leaped ~~from the step to the ground~~ flopping about the yard, stupidly unaware that it was dead. Drops of blood spattered on my bare feet. I looked quickly up at my mother to see whether or not I should be afraid. But her eyes—gold flecked, calm, almost dreamy—watched the chicken's dying spasms without fear. She looked tired, very, very tired. Once the hen was still, she carried it into the kitchen, dipped it into ~~the~~ boiling water ~~and~~ ^{preparing to} picked it clean. ~~I~~ ^{And we were} was not afraid to watch.

I ate alone that summer evening. Stewed chicken and fried tomatoes.

When my father and my sister came home I was sent to bed. From the top of the stairs I listened to the quiet that followed my father's words, "The doctor says she's all right." Then I heard my sister crying, crying. My mother's voice was hard and bitter—stiff with an emotion I have not yet been able to name. She spit the word "rape" out of her mouth like the rotten part of an apple. My sister never stopped crying and I fell asleep with her gasping choking cries in my ears.

Later she came to bed. Creeping silently over me to her side by the wall. It was dawning and I could see her face—wet and puffy. For such a little girl she had the beautiful hands of a woman. They rested now, prettily slender, on the sheet. Every now and then her breath would come

shuddering from her chest and die away in a sigh.

I didn't know precisely what rape meant but I knew it was bad—bad like the magazines in Mr. Shelby's room were bad.

But if Mr. Shelby had raped her why had they made her cry? Wasn't he to blame?

I looked again at my sister's hand lying on the sheet. It looked sad. I wanted to touch it, but something—something akin to shame held me back. For a long time I lay there trying to go ahead and touch my sister's hand. I fell asleep still trying. But I think I touched her later, in a dream—or maybe it wasn't a dream. I hope to God it wasn't.

Chloe Wofford Morrison
Chloe Wofford Morrison

Now I know that
~~The fact of the matter is~~ there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941.

We thought, at the time, that it was because Eunice was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow. A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout. Nobody's did. Not even the gardens fronting the lake showed marigolds that year. But so deeply concerned were we with the health and safe delivery of ,

Eunice's baby we could think of nothing but our own incantations:

if we planted the packet of seeds that had appeared in our mailbox, ~~and~~ ^{MAGIC} ^{AND SING THE RIGHT WORDS OVER THEM} ^{WOULD} ^{AND} they blossom[^], everything would be all right. [^]

It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that ~~no green shoots would spring from our seeds.~~ ^{WOULD SPRING FROM OUR SEEDS.} ~~they would never show above the ground.~~ Once we knew, our guilt was

relieved only by fights and mutual accusations about who was to blame.

For years I thought my sister was right: it was my fault. I had planted them too deep in the earth. ^{Far down} It never occurred to either of us that the

earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as ^{Eunice's father} ~~Mr. Winder~~ had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith was no

more productive than his lust or despair. What is clear, now, is that of all of that hope, fear, lust, ^{love} [^] and grief, nothing remains but Eunice

Winder and the unyielding earth. Cholly Winder is dead; our innocence too.

The seeds shrivelled and died; her baby too.

There is really nothing more to say--except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.

Perhaps it is best to use the seasons to describe that long ago time. For unlike life, seasons are coherent and orderly. They are also evocative. Working through them one recollects people and things early known and early forgotten. For example: I break into the tightness of a strawberry and there lies summer. I think of summer ^{its} dust and lowering skies. I smell a summer storm in the town where I lived and remember my mother's ^{a summer} ~~summer~~ ^{known in} of 1929. There was a tornado that year, she said, that blew away half of South Lorain. I mix her summer with my own: biting the strawberry, smelling a summer storm, I see her. A slim young girl in a pink crepe dress. One hand is on her hip; the other lolls about her ~~high~~ thigh--waiting. The wind swoops her up high above the houses, but she is still standing, hand on hip. Smiling. The anticipation and promise in her lolling hand are not ^{picture altered} ~~extinguished~~ by the haulocaust. In the summer tornado of 1929 my mother's hand is unextinguished. She is strong, smiling, and relaxed while the world falls down about her.

So much for memory. Public fact becomes private reality, and the seasons of a midwestern town become the Moirai of all our lives.

autumn

^{rust}
Nuns go by as quiet as leaves and drunken men with sober eyes sing in the lobby of the Greek hotel. ¹ My sister Frieda and I have new brown stockings and, if my father has found work, cod liver oil. Grown ups talk in tired, edgy voices about Zick's Coal Company and take us along in the evening to the railroad tracks. There we fill burlap sacks with the tiny pieces of coal lying about. Later we walk home glancing back to see the great car loads of slag being dumped, red hot and smoking

PAGE THREE

into the ravine that skirts the steel mill. The dying fire lights the sky with a dull orange glow. Frieda; and I lag behind staring at the patch of color surrounded by black. It is impossible not to feel a shiver when our feet leave the gravel path and sink into the dead grass in the field.

Our house is old, cold and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room. The others are braced in darkness, ~~empt~~ peopled by roaches and mice. Adults do not talk to us--they give us direction. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us, if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration. Now, they ask us, do you expect ^{anybody} me to get anything done if you're sick? We can not answer them. Our illness is treated with contempt, foul Black Draught, and castor oil that blunts our minds.

In spite of this, on ^a the day after a trip to collect coal I cough once, loudly ^{through bronchial tubes already} a-cough packed tight with phlegm. My mother ^{frowns} sighs: "Great Jesus. Get on in that bed. How many times do I have to tell you to wear something on your head? You must be the biggest fool in this town. Frieda? Get some rags and stuff that window."

Frieda re-stuffs the window. I trudge off to bed, full of guilt and self-pity. I lie down in my underwear, the metal in my black garters hurts my legs, but I do not take them off for it is too cold to lie; stockingless. It takes a long time for my body to heat ^{its} my place in the bed. Once I have generated a silhouette of warmth I dare not move, for there is a cold place one half inch in any direction. No one speaks to me or asks how I feel. In an hour or two my mother

comes. Her hands are large and rough, and when she rubs the Vick's salve ~~only~~^{my} chest I am rigid with pain. She takes two fingers full of it at a time and massages my chest until I am faint. Just when I think I will tip over into a scream she scoops; ~~XXXX~~ out a little of the salve on her forefinger and puts it into my mouth, telling me to swallow. A hot flannel is wrapped around my neck and chest. I am covered up with ~~heavy~~ heavy ;guilts and ordered to sweat, which I do, promptly.

Later I throw up and my mother says " What did you puke on the bed clothes for? Don't you have sense enough to hold your head out the bed? Now look what you did. You think I got time for nothing but washing up your puke?"

The puke swaddles down the pillow onto the sheet--green grey with flecks of orange. It moves like the insides of an uncooked egg. Stubbornly clinging to its own ~~XXXX~~ mass, refusing to break up and be removed. How, I wonder, can it be so neat and ~~XXX~~ nasty at the same time?

My mother's voice drones on. She is not talking to me. She is talking to the puke but she is calling it my name. She wipes it up as best she can, and puts a scratchy towel over the large wet place. I lie down again. The rags have fallen from the window crack and the air is cold. I dare not call her back, and am reluctant to leave my warmth. My mother's anger humiliates me; her words cut me every which way and I am crying. I do not know that she is not mad at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness "Take hold." By and by I will not get sick. I will refuse to. But for now I am crying. I know I am making more snot, but I can't stop.

page five

My sister comes in. Her eyes are full of sorrow. She sings to me:
"When the deep purple falls over sleepy garden walls, some one thinks
of me..." A popular tune about love. I doze, thinking of ~~purple~~ plums,
walls and "someone."

But was it really like that? was all of that comic, or was it
as painful as I remember it? Only mildly. Or rather it was a productive
and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark ~~and~~ as Alaga syrup eased up
into the cracked window. ^I ^{Smell it} could taste it--sweet, musty, with an edge
of wintergreen in its base--^{in that house} everywhere. It stuck, along with ^{my} our tongues,
to the frosted window panes. It coated ^{my} our chests along with the salve, and
when the ~~fx~~ flannel came undone in ^{my sleep} the night, the clear, sharp curves of
air outlined ^{its} presence on ^{my} our throats. And in the night, when ^{my} ~~we~~ coughing
was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, ~~and~~ hands re-pinned the
flannel, re-adjusted the quilt, ^{and} rested a moment on ^{my} our foreheads.

THE BLUEST EYE

Toni Morrison

Now I know that there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Eunice was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow. A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout; nobody's did. Not even the gardens fronting the lake showed marigolds that year. But so deeply concerned were we with the health and safe delivery of Eunice's baby we could think of nothing but our own magic: if we planted the packet of seeds that had appeared in our mailbox, and said the right words over them, they would blossom, and everything would be all right.

It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green would spring from our seeds. Once we knew, our guilt was relieved only by fights and mutual accusations about who was to blame. For years I thought my sister was right: it was my fault. I had planted them too far down in the earth. It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Eunice's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith was no more productive than his lust or despair. What is clear, now, is that of all of that hope, fear, lust, love, and grief, nothing remains but Eunice and the unyielding earth. Cholly Winder is dead; our innocence too. The seeds shrivelled and died; her baby too.

There is really nothing more to say--except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.

Perhaps it is best to use the seasons to describe that long ago time. For unlike life, seasons are coherent and orderly. They are also evocative. Working through them one recollects people and things early known and early forgotten. For example: I break into the tightness of a strawberry and there lies summer. I think of summer--its dust and lowering skies. I smell a summer storm in the town where I lived and remember a summer my mother knew in 1929. There was a tornado that year, she said, that blew away half of South Lorain. I mix her summer up with my own. Biting the strawberry, smelling a summer storm, I see her. A slim young girl in a pink crepe dress. One hand is on her hip; the other lolls about her thigh--waiting. The wind swoops her up high above the houses, but she is still standing, hand on hip. Smiling. The anticipation and promise in her lolling hand are not altered by the haulo-caust. In the summer tornado of 1929, my mother's hand is unextinguished. She is strong, smiling, and relaxed while the world falls down about her.

So much for memory. Public face[†] becomes private reality, and the seasons of a midwestern town become the Moirai of all our lives.

autumn

Nuns go by as quiet as lust and drunken men with sober eyes sing in the lobby of the Greek hotel. Rosemary Magazine, our next-door friend who lives above her father café, sits in a 1934 Buick eating bread and

butter. She rolls down the window to tell my sister Frieda and I that we can't come in. We stare at her wanting her bread but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth. When she comes out of the car we will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin, and she will cry and ask us do we want her to pull her pants down. We will say no. We don't know what we should feel or do if she does, but whenever she asks us, we know she is offering us something and that our own pride must be asserted by refusing to accept.

School has started and Frieda and I get new brown stockings, and, if my father has found work, cod liver oil. Grown ups talk in tired, edgy voices about Zick's Coal Company, and take us along in the evening to the railroad tracks. There we fill burlap sacks with the tiny pieces of coal lying about. Later we walk home glancing back to see the great car loads of slag being dumped, red hot and smoking into the ravine that skirts the steel mill. The dying fire lights the sky with a dull orange glow. Frieda and I lag behind staring at the patch of color surrounded by black. It is impossible not to feel a shiver when our feet leave the gravel path and sink into the dead grass in the field.

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autumn

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butter. She rolls down the window to tell my sister Frieda and I that we can't come in. We stare at her wanting her bread but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth. When she comes out of the car we will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin, and she will cry and ask us do we want her to pull her pants down. We will say no. We don't know what we should feel or do if she does, but whenever she asks us, we know she is offering us something and that our own pride must be asserted by refusing to accept.

School has started and Frieda and I get new brown stockings, and, if my father has found work, cod liver oil. Grown ups talk in tired, edgy voices about Zick's Coal Company, and take us along in the evening to the railroad tracks. There we fill burlap sacks with the tiny pieces of coal lying about. Later we walk home glancing back to see the great car loads of slag being dumped, red hot and smoking into the ravine that skirts the steel mill. The dying fire lights the sky with a dull orange glow. Frieda and I lag behind staring at the patch of color surrounded by black. It is impossible not to feel a shiver when our feet leave the gravel path and sink into the dead grass in the field.

Our house is old, cold, and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room. The others are braced in darkness, peopled by roaches and mice. Adults do not talk to us--they give us direction. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration. How, they ask us, do you expect anybody to get anything done if you all are sick? We can not answer them. Our illness is treated with contempt, foul Black Draught, and castor oil that blunts our minds.

In spite of this, on a day after a trip to collect coal I cough one, loudly, through bronchial tubes already packed tight with phelgm. My mother frowns. "Great Jesus. Get on in that bed. How many times do I have to tell you to wear something on your head? You must be the biggest fool in this town. Frieda? Get some rags and stuff that window."

Frieda re-stuffs the window. I trudge off to bed, full of guilt and self-pity. I lie down in my underwear, the metal in my black garters hurts my legs, but I do not take them off for it is too cold to lie stockingless. It takes a long time for my body to heat its place in the bed. Once I have generated a silhouette of warmth I dare not move, for there is a cold place one half inch in any direction. No one speaks to me or asks how I feel. In an hour or two my mother comes. Her hands are large and rough, and when she rubs the Vick's salve on my chest I am rigid with pain. She takes two fingers full of it at a time, and massages my chest until I am faint. Just when I think I will tip over into a scream, she scoops out a little of the salve on her forefinger and puts it in my mouth telling me to swallow. A hot flannel is wrapped about my neck and chest. I am covered up with heavy quilts and ordered to sweat, which I do--promptly.

Later I throw up and my mother says "What did you puke on the bed clothes for? Don't you have sense enough to hold your head out the bed? Now look what you did. You think I got time for nothing but washing up your puke?"

The puke swaddles down the pillow onto the sheet--green grey with flecks of orange. It moves like the insides of an uncooked egg. Stubbornly clinging to its own mass, refusing to break up and be removed. How, I wonder, can it be so neat and nasty at the same time?

My mother's voice drones on. She is not talking to me. She is talking

to the puke but she is calling it my name: Claudia. She wipes it up as best she can, and puts a scratchy towel over the large wet place. I lie down again. The rags have fallen from the window crack and the air is cold. I dare not call her back, and am reluctant to leave my warmth. My mother's anger humiliates me; her words cut me every which way and I am crying. I do not know that she is not mad at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness "take holt." By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. But for now I am crying. I know I am making more snot, but I can't stop.

My sister comes in. Her eyes are full of sorrow. She sings to me: "When the deep purple falls over sleepy garden walls, some one thinks of me..." I doze thinking of plums, walls, and "someone."

But was it really like that? Was all of that funny? Or was it as painful as I remember it? Only mildly. Or rather it was a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it--taste it--sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base--everywhere in that house. It stuck, along with my tongue, to the frosted window panes. It coated my chest, along with the salve, and when the flannel came undone in my sleep, the clear, sharp curves of air outlined its presence on my throat. And in the night, when my coughing was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hands re-pinned the flannel, re-adjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead.

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THE BLUEST EYE

77th page
Toni Morrison

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25

Now I know that there ~~were~~ ^{Summer} no marigolds in the ~~fall~~ of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because ^{Pecola} ~~Eunice~~ was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow. A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout; nobody's did. Not even the gardens fronting the lake showed marigolds that year. But so deeply concerned were we with the health and safe delivery of ^{Pecola's} ~~Eunice's~~ baby we could think of nothing but our own magic: if we planted the ~~packet~~ of seeds ~~that had appeared in our mailbox~~, and said the right words over them, they would blossom, and everything would be all right.

It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green ^{was going to} ~~would~~ spring from our seeds. Once we knew, our guilt was relieved only by fights and mutual accusations about who was to blame. For years I thought my sister was right: it was my fault. I had planted them too far down in the earth. It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as ^{Pecola} ~~Eunice's~~ father had dropped his seeds in his own ^{little} plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith was no more productive than ^{his} ~~his~~ lust or despair. What is clear, now, is, that of all of that hope, fear, lust, love, and grief, nothing remains but ^{Pecola} ~~Eunice~~ and the unyielding earth. ^{Barbecue} ~~Cholly~~ ~~Winder~~ is dead; our innocence too. The seeds shrivelled and died; her baby too.

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THE BLUEST EYE

by Toni Morrison

The House

There is an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-first Street in Lorain, Ohio. It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the grey frame houses and telephone poles on that block. Rather it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look away when they pass it.

At one time, when the building housed a pizza parlor, people only saw slow-footed teenage boys huddling about the corner. They met there to feel their groins, smoke cigarettes, and plan mild outrages. The smoke from their cigarettes they inhaled deeply, forcing it to fill their lungs, their hearts, their thighs, and keep at bay the shiveriness, the energy of their youth. They moved slowly, laughed slowly, but flicked the ashes from their cigarettes too quickly, too often, and exposed themselves, to those who were interested, as novices to the habit. But long before the sound of their lowing and the sight of their preening, the building was leased to an Hungarian baker, modestly famous for his brioche and poppyseed rolls.

page two

Earlier than that, there was a real estate office there, and even before that, some gypsies used it as a base of operations. The gypsy family gave the large plate glass window as much distinction and character as it ever had. The girls of the family took turns sitting between the yards of velvet draperies and oriental rugs hanging at the windows. They looked out, and occasionally smiled or winked or beckoned-- only occasionally. Mostly they looked. Their elaborate dresses, long-sleeved and long-skirted, hid the nakedness of ~~their bodies~~ that stood in their eyes. ?

So fluid has the population in that area always been that probably no one remembers longer, longer ago, before the time of the gypsies and the time of the ^{the} teenagers' joy, when Eunice Winder ^s lived there.

Nestled together in the storefront. Festerings together in the debris of a realtor's whim. They slipped in and out of that box of peeling grey making no stir in the neighborhood, no sound in the labor force, no wave on the mayor's office. Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality--collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there. [From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do with the way they found each other.]

The plan of their living quarters was as unimaginative as a first generation Greek landlord could contrive it to be. The large "store" area was partitioned into two rooms by beaver board planks that did not reach to the ceiling. There was a living room, which the family called the front room, and the bedroom where all the living was done. In the front room were two sofas, an upright piano, and a tiny artificial Christmas tree which had been there, decorated and dust-laden, for two years. The bedroom had three beds: a narrow iron bed for Sammy, fourteen years old; another for Eunice, eleven years old; and a double bed for

Cholly and Mrs. Winder. In the center of the bedroom, for the even distribution of heat, stood a coal stove. Trunks, chairs, a small end table, and a cardboard "wardrobe" were placed around the walls. The kitchen was in the back of this apartment, a separate room. There were no bath facilities. Only a toilet bowl, inaccessible to the eye, if not the ear, of the tenants.

There is nothing more to say about the furnishings. They were anything but conversation pieces, having been created, manufactured, shipped, and sold in various states of thoughtlessness, greed, and indifference. The furniture had aged without ever having become familiar. People had owned it, but never known it. No one had lost a penny or a brooch under the cushions of either sofa and remembered the place and time of the loss or the finding. No one had clucked and said, "But I had it just a minute ago. I was sitting right there talking to such and such..." or "Here it is! It must have slipped down while I was feeding the baby!" No one had given birth in one of the beds--or remembered with fondness the peeled paint places because that's what the baby, when he learned to pull up, used to pick loose. No thrifty child had tucked a wad of gum under the table. No happy drunk, a friend of the family, with a fat neck, unmarried, you know, but god, how he eats! ever sat at the piano and played "You are My Sunshine." No young girl had stared at the tiny Christmas tree and remembered when she had decorated it, or wondered if that blue ball was going to hold, or if He would ever come back to see it.

There were no memories among those pieces. ⁽¹⁾ The only living thing in the house was the coal stove, which lived independently of everything and everyone, its fire being "out," "banked," or "up" at its own discretion. The family fed it. Two or three coal shovelfull. Sprinkle ~~it~~. Do not dump. Not too much,

Insert
(1)
attached

produces an irritating malaise that asserts itself throughout thehouse and limits the delight of things not related to it.

Inst ①

There were no memories among these pieces. Certainly no memories to be cherished. Occasionally an item provoked a physical reaction: an increase of acid irritation in the upper intestinal tract, a light flush of perspiration at the back of the neck as circumstances surrounding the piece of furniture were recalled. The couch for example. It had been purchased new, but the fabric had split straight across the back by the time it was delivered. The store would not take the responsibility..

"Looka here, buddy. It was OK when I put it on the truck. The store can't do anything about it once it's on the truck....." Listerine and Lucky Strike breath.

"But I don't want no tore couch if'n it's bought new." Pleading eyes and tightened testicles.

"Tough shit, buddy. Your tough shit".....

You could hate a couch, of course, if you could hate a couch. But it didn't matter. You still had to get together \$4.80 a month. If you had to pay \$4.80 a month for a couch that started off split, no good, and evil you couldn't take any joy in owning it. And the joylessness stank, pervading everything. The stink of it kept you from painting the beaver-board walls; from getting a matching piece of material for the chair; even from sewing up the split, which became a gash, which became a gaping chasm that exposed the cheap frame and cheaper upholstery. It withheld the refreshment in a sleep slept on it. It imposed a furtiveness on the loving done on it. Like a sore tooth that is not content

to throb in isolation, but must diffuse its own pain to other parts of the body: making breathing difficult, vision limited, nerves unsettled, so a hated piece of furniture produces an irritating malaise that asserts itself throughout the house and limits the delight of things not related to it.

or it smothers. And the fire lived, died, or went down according to a schemata no one understood, or perhaps whenever it saw fit. ^{In the} This morning it had ^{saw} ~~seen~~ fit to die.

Insert THE FAMILY
Cholly
Mrs. Winder slipped noiselessly out of bed, put a sweater on over her nightgown, which was an old "day dress", and walked toward the kitchen. Her hard bony feet made hard, bony sounds. In the kitchen, with cupboard doors, the stove door, faucets, and pans, she made noises. The noises were hollow, but the threats they implied were not. Eunice opened her eyes. She lay staring at the dead stove. cold and hostile. Cholly mumbled, thrashed about for a minute, and then was quiet.

Even from where Eunice lay, she could smell Cholly's whiskey. The noises in the kitchen became louder and less howlow; there was direction and purpose in Mrs. Winder's movements that had nothing to do with the preparation of breakfast. This awareness, supported by ample evidence from the past, made Eunice tighten her stomach muscles and breathe ^{ration her} ~~stingily~~. ~~She measured and rationed out her breath as though conserving it.~~

Cholly had come home drunk. Unfortunately he had been too drunk to quarrel, so the whole business would have to erupt this morning. Because it had not taken place immediately, the oncoming fight would lack spontaneity; it would be calculated, uninspired, and deadly.

Mrs. Winder came swiftly into the room and stood at the foot of Cholly's bed.

"I need some coal in this house."

Cholly did not move.

"Hear me?" Mrs. Winder jabbed Cholly's foot.

Cholly opened his eyes slowly. They were red and menacing. ~~With the exception of Grey Eye, who had killed thirteen men and spent only fourteen~~

Amily

2. a

The Winder family did not live in a storefront because the war was just over and they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant; they lived there because they were poor, sloven, mean, and ugly. Although their poverty had always been congenital, one felt their slovenliness and meanness was a result of their ugliness, for stultifying and traditional as their poverty was, it was not unique; and though their meanness and slovenliness were legend, there were periods of abatement in both. But they were relentlessly, aggressively ugly.

Except for the father, Cholly Winder, whose ugliness was the result of ignorance bordering on idiocy, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people, the rest of the family--Mrs. Winder, Sammy Winder, add Eunice Winder, were ugly in the same way. Not deformed,

which would have been pitiable, nor plain, which would have been forgivable. Theirs was an ugliness which would not apologize for itself. The eyes, the small eyes set far too closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen, but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones and their ears turned forward.

But they had pretty mouths. That was the final insult which sealed the otherwise open mind. The shapely lips and fine, even teeth called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. The mouth, then, as if by design, kept the face from an ugliness that was complete, only to give it an ugliness that was compelling. The aesthetes who say that beauty is the juxtaposition of the perfect with the imperfect, the subtle distortions of the ideal, have never seen Sammy Winder. True ugliness, that is, ugliness in a vacuum--pristine and untampered with--is more seldom than true beauty.

This family then, on a Saturday morning in October of 1947, began, one by one, to stir out of their dreams of affluence and vengeance into the oppressive misery of their storefront.

some mysterious master
of all things ugly
It was an ugliness, and one
of the ugliest of ugliness, to deal with a face
+ they had accepted it without question (more)

But he looked at them and wondered why
they were so ugly. You looked closely & could not find its source. Then you realized
that it came from conviction.

THE
YJIMAY
The master had said "You are ugly
people" They had looked
about themselves and saw
nothing to contradict the statement
saw, in fact, support for it
peering at them from every
billboard, every movie, every
glance. "Yes," they had said.

You are ugly" And took
the ugliness in their hands
threw it as a mortar over
them + went about the
world with it. Bleeding with
it each according to his
way.

days in jail, Cholly had the meanest eyes in that town.

"Awwwww, woman!"

"I said I need some coal. It's as cold as a witch's tit in this house. Your whiskey butt wouldn't feel hellfire, but I'm cold. I got to do a lot of things, but I ain't got to freeze!"

"Leave me 'lone."

"Not until you get me some coal. If working like a mule don't give me the right to ^{be warm} heat, what am I doing it for? You sure ain't bringing nothing in. If it was left up to you we'd all be dead!..."

Her voice was like a dirty fingernail picking at his brain. "...you think I'm going to wade out in the cold and get it myself?" ^{you better think again}

"I don't give a goddam ^{shit} how you get it." ^{Cholly}

"You going to get your drunk self out of that bed and get me some coal or not?"

Silence.

"Cholly!"

Silence.

"Don't try me this morning, Cholly. You say one more word and I'll split you open!"

Silence.

"All right. All right. But if I sneeze once, just once, God help your butt!"

Sammy was awake now, but pretending to be asleep. Eunice held her stomach in and ^{concerned} rationed her breath. Everybody knew that Mrs. Winder could have, would have, and had gotten coal from the shed, or that either Sammy or Eunice could be directed to get it. The unquarreled evening hung like the first note of a dirge in sullenly expectant air. An escapade of drunkenness, no matter how

routine, had its own ceremonial close. The tiny, amonalous little days that Mrs. Winder lived were identified, grouped, and classed by these quarrels. They gave substance to the minutes and hours otherwise indistinctive and unrecalled. They relieved the tiresomeness of poverty, gave grandeur to the dead rooms. In these violent breaks in routine that were themselves routine, she could display the style and imagination of what what she believed to be her own true self. To deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of life. Cholly, by his habitual drunkenness and onwriiness, provided them both with the material they needed to make their lives tolerable. Mrs. Winder considered herself an upright and Christian woman, burdened with a no-count man, whom God wanted her to punish (Cholly was beyond redemption, of course, and redemption was hardly the point.). Often she could be heard discoursing with God about Cholly, pleading with Him to help her "strike the bastard down." And once when a drunken gesture catapulted Cholly into the red-hot stove, she screamed "Get him, Lord! Get him!" If Cholly had stopped drinking, she would never have forgiven God. She needed desparately Cholly's sins. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she had her task became. In the sight of God.

No less did Cholly need her. She was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact. When a very young boy, Cholly had been surprised, in some bushes, by two policeman while he was newly but earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl he had long pursued. The policeman

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had shone a flashlight right on his behind. He had stopped, terrified. They chuckled. The flashlight did not move. "Go on," they said. "Go on and finish. And, nigger, make it good." The flashlight did not move. For some reason Cholly had not hated the policemen; he hated, despised the girl. Even half remembrance of this episode, along with a myriad other humiliation, defeats, could stir him into flights of depravity that surprised himself, but only himself. Somehow he could not astound; he could only be astounded. So he gave that up, too.

Cholly and Mrs. Winder fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking. ~~Both were comparable to a~~ ballet in hell. Tacitly they had agreed not to kill each other. He fought her the way a coward fights a man--feet, fists, and teeth. She, in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way--with frying pans, pokers, and, occasionally, a flat iron would spin toward his head. They did not talk, groan, or curse during these beatings. There was only the muted sound of falling things, and flesh on unsurprised flesh.

There was a difference in the reaction of the children to these battles. Sammy cursed for a while, or left the house, or threw himself into the fray. He was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have run away from home no less than twenty-seven times. Once he got to Buffalo and stayed three months. His returns, whether by force or circumstance, were sullen. Eunice, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance. Though the methods varied, the pain was as consistent as it was deep. She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die. Now she was whispering, "Don't

page nine

Mrs. Winder. Dont, Mrs. Winder."

By the grace, no doubt, of God, Mrs. Winder sneezed. Just once.

She ran into the bedroom with a dishpan full of cold water and threw it in Cholly's face. He sat up, choking and spitting. Naked and ashen, he leaped from the bed and with a flying tackle, grabbed his wife around the waist and they hit the floor. Cholly picked her up and knocked her down. She fell in a sitting position, her back supported by Sammy's bed-frame. She had not let go of the dishpan and began to hit Cholly about the head and shoulders with it. He gave her a short right to the left of her stomach. She dropped the pan. Several times he struck her in the face and she might have succumbed early had Cholly not smashed his fist against the metal of the bedframe when his wife ducked. Mrs. Winder took advantage of this momentary suspension in blows and slipped out of his reach. Sammy, who had watched in silence their struggling at his bedside, suddenly began to hit his father about the head with both fists, shouting, "You maked bastard! You naked bastard!" over and over and over. Mrs. Winder, having snatched up the round, flat stovelid, ran tip toe to Cholly as he was pulling himself up from his knees, and struck him two blows, knocking him right back into the senselessness out of which she had provoked him. Panting, she threw a blanket over him and let him lie.

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Letting herself breathe easy now, Eunice covered her head with the quilt. The sick feeling, which she had tried to prevent by holding in her stomach, came quickly in spite of her precaution. There surged in her the desire to heave, but as always, she knew she would not. "Please, God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally, finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left.

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It had occurred to Eunice some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights--if these eyes of hers were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was ^{not} big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Winder too. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Eunice. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes."

Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run.
Jip runs. Alic runs. Alice had blue eyes. Jerry had blue eyes. Jerry runs.
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eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like-Mrs. Forrest's-blue-blouse-eyes. Morning-glory-
blue eyes. Alice-and-Herry-Blue Storybook eyes.

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time.

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~~Part Two~~

~~THE LITTLE GIRL:~~

~~SEE JANE. SHE HAS A RED DRESS. SHE WANTS TO PLAY.~~
~~Who will play with Jane?~~

It would be inaccurate to say that Eunice had no friends. Three
whores who lived in the apartment above did not despise her. Eunice
loved them. A source of very real pleasure for her was to visit them
and run errands for them.

These women fulfilled the obligations of their profession with
liveliness, chicanery, and earthy brutality. The simplicity of their
attitudes about themselves was reflected in their names: Hooks, Chain, and
Fan. The beauty and appropriateness of each name lay in the fact that it
recalled the tangible, and therefore understandable, world of things which
their business professed to obscure.

Revise

Remember
it H. Jones

THE BLUEST EYE

by Toni Morrison

There is an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-first Street in Lorain, Ohio. It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the grey frame houses and telephone poles on that block. Rather it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look away when they pass it.

At one time, when the building housed a pizza parlor, people only saw slow-footed teenage boys huddling about the corner. They met there to feel their groins, smoke cigarettes, and plan mild outrages. The smoke from their cigarettes they inhaled deeply, forcing it to fill their lungs, their hearts, their thighs, and keep at bay the shiveriness, the energy of their youth. They moved slowly, laughed slowly, but flicked the ashes from their cigarettes too quickly, too often, and exposed themselves, to those who were interested, as novices to the habit. But long before the sound of their howling and the sight of their preening, the building was leased to an Hungarian baker, modestly famous for his brioche and poppyseed rolls.

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Earlier than that, there was a real estate office there, and even before that, some gypsies used it as a base of operations. The gypsy family gave the large plate glass windows as much distinction and character as it ever had. The girls of the family took turns sitting between the yards of velvet draperies and oriental rugs hanging at the windows. They looked out, and occasionally smiled or winked or beckoned-- only occasionally. Mostly they looked. Their elaborate dresses, long-sleeved and long-skirted, hid the nakedness of their bodies that stood in their eyes.

So fluid has the population in that area always been that probably no one remembers longer, longer ago, before the time of the gypsies and the time of the teenagers' joy, when Eunice Winder lived there.

The Winder family did not live in a storefront because the war was just over and they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant; they lived there because they were poor, sloven, mean, and ugly. Although their poverty had always been congenital, one felt their slovenliness and meanness was a result of their ugliness, for stultifying and traditional as their poverty was, it was not unique; and though their meanness and slovenliness were legend, there were periods of abatement in both. But they were relentlessly, aggressively ugly.

Except for the father, Cholly Winder, whose ugliness was the result of ignorance bordering on idiocy, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people, the rest of the family--Mrs. Winder, Sammy Winder, and Eunice Winder, were ugly in the same way. Not deformed,

which would have been pitiable, nor plain, which would have been forgivable. Theirs was an ugliness which would not apologize for itself. The eyes, the small eyes set far too closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen, but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones and their ears turned forward. But they had pretty mouths. That was the final insult which sealed the otherwise open mind. The shapely lips and fine, even teeth called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. The mouth, then, as if by design, kept the face from an ugliness that was complete, only to give it an ugliness that was compelling. The aesthetes who say that beauty is the juxtaposition of the perfect with the imperfect, the subtle distortions of the ideal, have never seen Sammy Winder. True ugliness, that is, ugliness in a vacuum--pristine and untampered with--is more seldom than true beauty.

This family then, on a Saturday morning in October of 1947, began, one by one, to stir out of their dreams of affluence and vengeance into the oppressive misery of their storefront.

The plan of their living quarters was as unimaginative as a first generation Greek landlord could contrive it to be. The large "store" area was partitioned into two rooms by beaver board planks that did not reach to the ceiling. There was a living room, which the family called the front room, and the bedroom where all the living was done. In the front room were two sofas, an upright piano, and a tiny artificial Christmas tree which had been there, decorated and dust-laden, for two years. The bedroom had three beds: a narrow iron bed for Sammy, fourteen years old; another for Eunice, eleven years old; and a double bed for

Cholly and Mrs. Winder. In the center of the bedroom, for the even distribution of heat, stood a coal stove. Trunks, chairs, a small end table, and a cardboard "wardrobe" were placed around the walls. The kitchen was in the back of this apartment, a separate room. There were no bath facilities. Only a toilet bowl, inaccessible to the eye, if not the ear of the tenants.

There is nothing more to say about the furnishings. They were anything but conversation pieces, having been created, manufactured, shipped, and sold in various states of thoughtlessness, greed, and indifference. The furniture had aged without ever having become familiar. People had owned it, but never known it. No one had lost a penny or a brooch under the cushions of either sofa and remembered the place and time of the loss or the finding. No one had clucked and said, "But I had it just a minute ago. I was sitting right there talking to such and such..." or "Here it is! It must have slipped down while I was feeding the baby!" No one had given birth in one of the beds--or remembered with fondness the peeled paint places because that's what the baby, when he learned to pull up, used to pick loose. No thrifty child had tucked a wad of gum under the table. No happy drunk, a friend of the family, with a fat neck, unmarried, you know, but god, how he eats! ever sat at the piano and played "You are My Sunshine." No young girl had stared at the tiny Christmas tree and remembered when she had decorated it, or wondered if that blue ball was going to hold, or if He would ever come back to see it.

There were no memories among those pieces. The only living thing in the house was the coal stove, which lived independently of everything and everyone, its fire being "out," "banked," or "up" at its own discretion. The family fed it. Two or three coal shovelfull. Sprinkle it. Do not dump. Not too much,

or it smothers. And the fire lived, died, or went down according to a schemata no one understood, or perhaps whenever it saw fit. This morning it had seen fit to die.

Mrs. Winder slipped noiselessly out of bed, put a sweater on over her nightgown, which was an old "day dress", and walked toward the kitchen. Her hard bony feet made hard, bony sounds. In the kitchen, with cupboard doors, the stove door, faucets, and pans, she made noises. The noises were hollow, but the threats they implied were not. Eunice opened her eyes. She lay staring at the dead stove. cold and hostile. Cholly mumbled, thrashed about for a minute, and then was quiet.

Even from where Eunice lay, she could smell Cholly's whiskey. The noises in the kitchen became louder and less howlow; there was direction and purpose in Mrs. Winder's movements that had nothing to do with the preparation of breakfast. This awareness, supported by ample evidence from the past, made Eunice tighten her stomach muscles and breathe stingily. She measured and rationed out her breath as though conserving it.

Cholly had come home drunk. Unfortunately he had been too drunk to quarrel, so the whole business would have to erupt this morning. Because it had not taken place immediately, the oncoming fight would lack spontaneity; it would be calculated, uninspired, and deadly.

Mrs. Winder came swiftly into the room and stood at the foot of Cholly's bed.

"I need some coal in this house."

Cholly did not move.

"Hear me?" Mrs. Winder jabbed Cholly's foot.

Cholly opened his eyes slowly. They were red and menacing. With the exception of Grey Eye, who had killed thirteen men and spent only fourteen

days in jail, Cholly had the meanest eyes in that town.

"Awwwww, woman!"

"I said I need some coal. It's as cold as a witch's tit in this house. Your whiskey butt wouldn't feel hellfire, but I'm cold. I got to do a lot of things, but I ain't got to freeze!"

"Leave me 'lone."

"Not until you get me some coal. If working like a mule don't give me the right to heat, what am I doing it for? You sure ain't bringing nothing in. If it was left up to you we'd all be dead!..."

Her voice was like a dirty fingernail picking at his brain. "...you think I'm going to wade out in the cold and get it myself?"

"I don't give a goddam how you get it."

"You going to get your drunk self out of that bed and get me some coal or not?"

Silence.

"Cholly!"

Silence.

"Don't try me this morning, Cholly. You say one more word and I'll split you open!"

Silence.

"All right. All right. But if I sneeze once, just once, God help your butt!"

Sammy was awake now, but pretending to be asleep. Eunice held her stomach in and rationed her breath. Everybody knew that Mrs. Winder could have, would have, and had gotten coal from the shed, or that either Sammy or Eunice could be directed to get it. The unquarreled evening hung like the first note of a dirge in sullenly expectant air. An escapade of drunkenness, no matter how

routine, had its own ceremonial close. The tiny, anomalous little days that Mrs. Winder lived were identified, grouped, and classed by these quarrels. They gave substance to the minutes and hours otherwise indistinctive and unrecalled. They relieved the tiresomeness of poverty, gave grandeur to the dead rooms. In these violent breaks in routine that were themselves routine, she could display the style and imagination of what what she believed to be her own true self. To deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of life. Cholly, by his habitual drunkenness and oneriness, provided them both with the material they needed to make their lives tolerable. Mrs. Winder considered herself an upright and Christian woman, burdened with a no-count man, whom God wanted her to punish (Cholly was beyond redemption, of course, and redemption was hardly the point.). Often she could be heard discoursing with God about Cholly, pleading with Him to help her "strike the bastard down." And once when a drunken gesture catapulted Cholly into the red-hot stove, she screamed "Get him, Lord! Get him!" If Cholly had stopped drinking, she would never have forgiven God. She needed desperately Cholly's sins. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she had her task became. In the sight of God.

No less did Cholly need her. She was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact. When a very young boy, Cholly had been surprised, in some bushes, by two policeman while he was newly but earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl he had long pursued. The policeman

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had shone a flashlight right on his behind. He had stopped, terrified. They chuckled. The flashlight did not move. "Go on," they said. "Go on and finish. And, nigger, make it good." The flashlight did not move. For some reason Cholly had not hated the policemen; he hated, despised the girl. Even half remembrance of this episode, along with a myriad other humiliation, defeats, could stir him into flights of depravity that surprised himself, but only himself. Somehow he could not astound; he could only be astounded. So he gave that up, too.

Cholly and Mrs. Winder fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking. Both were comparable to a ballet in hell. Tacitly they had agreed not to kill each other. He fought her the way a coward fights a man--feet, fists, and teeth. She, in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way--with frying pans, pokers, and, occasionally, a flat iron would spin toward his head. They did not talk, groan, or curse during these beatings. There was only the muted sound of falling things, and flesh on unsurprised flesh.

There was a difference in the reaction of the children to these battles. Sammy cursed for a while, or left the house, or threw himself into the fray. He was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have run away from home no less than twenty-seven times. Once he got to Buffalo and stayed three months. His returns, whether by force or circumstance, were sullen. Eunice, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance. Though the methods varied, the pain was as consistent as it was deep. She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die. Now she was whispering, "Don't

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THE BLUEST EYE

by Toni Morrison

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At one time, when the building housed a pizza parlor, people only saw slow-footed teenage boys huddling about the corner. They met there to feel their groins, smoke cigarettes, and plan mild outrages. The smoke from their cigarettes they inhaled deeply, forcing it to fill their lungs, their hearts, their thighs, and keep at bay the shiveriness, the energy of their youth. They moved slowly, laughed slowly, but flicked the ashes from their cigarettes too quickly, too often, and exposed themselves, to those who were interested, as novices to the habit. But long before the sound of their lowing and the sight of their preening, the building was leased to an Hungarian baker, modestly famous for his brioche and poppyseed rolls.

Earlier than that, there was a real estate office there, and even before that, some gypsies used it as a base of operations. The gypsy family gave the large plate glass windows as much distinction and character as it ever had. The girls of the family took turns sitting between the yards of velvet draperies and oriental rugs hanging at the windows. They looked out, and occasionally smiled or winked or bec-

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So fluid has been the population in that area that probably no one remembers longer, longer ago, before the time of the gypsies and the time of the teenagers' joy, when Eunice Winder lived there.

The Winder family did not live in a storefront because the war was just over and they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant; they lived there because they were poor, sloven, mean, and ugly. Although their poverty had always been congenital, ✓ (oen felt their meanness and slovenliness were legend, there were periods of abatement in both. But they were relentlessly, aggressively ugly.

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There is nothing more to say about the furnishings. They were anything but conversation pieces, having been created, manufactured, shipped, and sold in various states of thoughtlessness, greed, and indifference. The furniture had aged without ever having become familiar. People had owned it, but never known it. No one had lost a penny or a brooch under the cushions of either sofa and remembered the place and time of the loss or the finding. No one had clucked and said, "But I had it just a minute ago. I was sitting right there

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two

So fluid has the population in that area been, that probably no one remembers longer, longer ago, before the time of the gypsies and the time of the teenagers when the Winders lived there. Nestled together in the storefront. Festering together in the debris of a realtor's whim. They slipped in and out of the box of peeling grey making no stir in the neighborhood, no sound in the labor force, and no wave in the mayor's office. Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality--collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there. From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another, they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do with the way they found each other.

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There is nothing more to say about the furnishings. They were anything

three

but describable, having been created, manufactured, shipped, and sold in various states of thoughtless, ^{ness}greed, and indifference.. The furniture had aged without ever having become familiar. People had owned it, but never known it. No one had lost a penny or a brooch under the cushions of either sofa and remembered the place and time of the loss or the finding. No one had clucked and said, "But I had it just a minute ago. I was sitting right there talking to...." or "Here it is. It must have slipped down while I was feeding the baby!" No one had given birth in one of the beds-- or remembered with fondness the peeled paint places because that's what the baby, when he learned to pull himself up, used to pick loose. No thrifty child had tucked a wa^d of gum under the table. No happy drunk, a friend of the family, with a fat neck, unmarried, you know, but god how he eats! had sat at the piano and played "You Are My Sunshine." No young girl had stared at the tiny Christmas tree and remembered when she had decorated it, or wondered if that blue ball was going to hold, or if HE would ever come back to see it.

There were no memories among those pieces. Certainly no memories to be cherished. Occasionally an item provoked a physical reaction: an increase of acid irritation in the upper intestinal tract, a light flush of perspiration at the back of the neck as circumstances surrounding the piece of furniture were recalled. The sofa for example. It had been purchased new, but the fabric had split straight across the back by the time it was delivered. The store would not take the responsibility...

"Looka here, buddy. It was ok when I put it on the truck. The store can't do anything about it once it's on the truck..." Listerine and Lucky Strike breath.

"But I don't want no tore couch if'n it's bought new." Pleading eyes

four

and tightened testicles.

"Tough shit, buddy. Your tough shit..."

You could hate a sofa, of course, that is if you could hate a sofa. But it didn't matter. You still had to get together \$4.80 a month. If you had to pay \$4.80 a month for a sofa that started off split, no good, and humiliating you couldn't take any joy in owning it. And the joylessness stank, pervading everything. The stink of it kept you from painting the beaver-board walls; from getting a matching piece of material for the chair; even from sewing up the split, which became a gash, which became a gaping chasm that exposed the chepp frame and chepper upholstery. It withheld the refreshment in a sleep slept on it. It imposed a furtiveness on the loving done on it. Like a sore tooth that is not content to throb in isolation, but must diffuse its own pain to other parts of the body--making breathing difficult, vision limited, nerves unsettled, so a hated piece of furniture produces an irritating malaise that asserts itself throughout the house and limits the delight of things not related to it.

The only living thing in the Winder's house was the coal stove which lived independently ^{of} ~~and~~ everything and everyone, its fire being "out," "banked," or "up" at its own discretion in spite of the fact that the family fed it and knew all the details of its regimen: sprinkle, do not dump, not too much... But the fire seemed to live, go down, or die according to its own schemata. In the morning, however, it always saw fit to die.

five

HERE IS THE FAMILY MOTHER FATHER DICK AND JANE THEY LIVE IN THE
GREEN AND WHITE HOUSE THEY ARE VERY HAPPY

The Winder family did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the pre-war cutbacks at the Plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. Relentlessly and aggressively ugly. No one could have convinced them that they were not. Except for the father, ^LColly, whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was real, the rest of the family-- Mrs. Winder, Sammy Winder and Eunice--wore their ugliness, put it on, so to ^Speak, although it did not belong to them. The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen, but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips and healthy teeth which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their own conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every

six

billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes." they had ^{fit} ~~shad~~. You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his way. Mrs. Winder handled hers as an actor does a prop: for the articulation of character, for support of a role she frequently imagined was ~~heres~~ ^{her} ~~---martyrdom~~. Sammy used his as a weapon to cause others pain. He adjusted his behavior to it, chose his companions on the basis of it: people he thought beautiful, who could be fascinated even intimidated by it. And Eunice. She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed--peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the falling away of her mask.

This family, on a Saturday morning in October began, one by one, to stir out of their dreams of affluence and vengeance into the anonymous misery of their storefront.

Mrs. Winder slipped noiselessly out of bed, put a sweater on over her nightgown (which was an old day dress) and walked toward the kitchen. Her hard bony feet made hard, bony sounds. In the kitchen she made noises with ~~even~~ doors, faucets, and pans. The noises were hollow, but the threats they implied were not. Eunice opened her eyes. She lay staring at the dead coal stove. Cholly mumbled, thrashed about in the bed for a minute, and then was quiet.

Even from where Eunice lay, she could smell Cholly's whiskey. The noises in the kitchen became louder and less hollow. There was direction and purpose in Mrs. Winder's movements that had nothing to do with the preparation of breakfast. This awareness, supported by ample evidence from the past, made Eunice tighten her stomach muscles and ration her breath.

Cholly had come home drunk. Unfortunately he had been too drunk to

seven

quarrel, so the whole business would have to erupt this morning. Because it had not taken place immediately, the oncoming fight would lack spontaneity; it would be calculated, uninspired, and deadly.

Mrs. Winder came swiftly into the room and stood at the foot of the bed where Cholly lay.

"I need some coal in this house."

Cholly did not move.

"hear me?" Mrs. Winder jabbed Cholly's foot.

Cholly opened his eyes slowly. They were red and menacing. With no exceptions, Cholly had the meanest eyes in town.

"Awwwww, woman!"

"I said I need some coal. It's as cold as a witch's tit in this house. Your whiskey ass wouldn't feel hellfire, but I'm cold. I got to do a lot of things, but I ain't got to freeze."

"Leave me lone."

"Not until you get me some coal. If working like a mule don't give me the right to be warm, what am I doing it for? You sure ain't ⁿbriggⁿing in nothing. If it was left up to you we'd all be dead...." Her voice was like an earache in the brain. "...if you think I'm going to wade out in the cold and get it myself, you'd better think again."

"I don't give a shit how you get it." A bubble of violence burst in his throat.

"You going to get your drunk self out of that bed and get me some coal or not?"

Silence.

"Cholly!"

Silence.

eight

"Don't try me this morning, man. You say one more word and I'll split you open!"

Silence.

"All right. All right. But if I sneeze once, just once, God help your butt!"

Sammy was awake now too, but pretending to be asleep. Eunice still held her stomach muscles taut and conserved her breath. Everybody knew that Mrs. Winder could have, would have, and had, gotten coal from the shed, or that Sammy or Eunice could be directed to get it. But the unquarreled evening hung like the first note of a dirge in sullenly expectant air. An escapade of drunkenness, no matter how routine, had its own ceremonial close. The tiny, undistinguished days that Mrs. Winder lived were identified, grouped, and classed by these quarrels. They gave substance to the minutes and hours otherwise dim and unrecalled. They relieved the tiresomeness of poverty, gave grandeur to the dead rooms. In these violent breaks in routine that were themselves routine, she could display the style and imagination of what she believed to be her own true self. To deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of life. Cholly, by his habitual drunkenness and oneriness, provided them both with the material they needed to make their lives tolerable. Mrs. Winder considered herself an upright and Christian woman, burdened with a no-count man, whom God wanted her to punish. (Cholly was beyond redemption, of course, and redemption was hardly the point--Mrs. Winder was not interested in Christ the Redeemer, but rather Christ the Judge.) Often she could be head discoursing with Jesus about Cholly, pleading with Him to help her "strike the

bastard down from his pea-knuckle of pride." And once when a drunken gesture catapulted Cholly into the red-hot stove, she screamed "Get him, Jesus! Get him!" If Cholly had stopped drinking, she would never have forgiven Jesus. She needed Cholly's sins desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became. In the name of Jesus.

No less did Cholly need her. She was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact. When he was still very young, Cholly had been surprised in some bushes by two policemen while he was newly but earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl he had long pursued. The policemen had shone a flashlight right on his behind. He had stopped, terrified. They chuckled. The beam of the flashlight did not move. "Go on," they said. "Go on and finish. And, nigger, make it good." The flashlight did not move. For some reason Cholly had not hated the policemen; he hated, despised, the girl. Even a half remembrance of this episode, along with myriad other humiliations, defeats, and demasculizations, could stir him into flights of depravity that surprised himself--but only himself. Somehow he could not astound. He could only be astounded. So he gave that up, too.

Cholly and Mrs. Winder fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking. Tacitly they had agreed not to kill each other. He fought her the way a coward fights a man--feet; the palms of his hands, and teeth. She, in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way--with frying pans, pokers, and occasionally, a

ten.

flat iron would sail toward his head. They did not talk, groan, or curse during these beatings. There was only the muted sound of falling things, and flesh on unsurprised flesh.

There was a difference in the reaction of the children to these battles. Sammy cursed for a while, or left the house, or threw himself into the fray. He was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have run away from home no less than twenty-seven times. Once he got to Buffalo and stayed three months. His returns, whether by force or circumstance, were sullen. Eunice, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance. Though the methods varied, the pain was as consistent as it was deep. She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die. Now she was whispering, "Don't Mrs. Winder. Don't." Eunice, like Sammy and Cholly, always called her mother Mrs. Winder.

"Don't Mrs. Winder. Don't."

But Mrs. Winder did.

By the grace, no doubt, of God, Mrs. Winder sneezed. Just once.

She ran into the bedroom with a dishpan full of cold water and threw it in Cholly's face. He sat up, choking and spitting. Naked and ashen, he leaped from the bed and, with a flying tackle, grabbed his wife around the waist and they hit the floor. Cholly picked her up and knocked her down with the back of his hand. She fell in a sitting position, her back supported by Sammy's bed frame. She had not let go of the dishpan and began to hit at Cholly's thighs and groin with it. He put his foot in her chest and she dropped the pan. Several times he struck her in the face and she might have succumbed early had he not hit his hand against the metal bedframe when his wife ducked. Mrs. Winder took advantage of this

eleven

momentary suspension of blows and slipped out of his reach. Sammy, who had watched in silence their struggling at his bedside, suddenly began to hit his father about the head with both fists, shouting "You naked prick!" over and over and over. Mrs. Winder, having snatched up the round, flat, stovelid, ran tippy toe to Cholly as he was pulling himself up from his knees, and struck him two blows, knocking him right back into the senselessness out of which she had provoked him. Panting, she threw a quilt over him and let him lie.

Sammy screamed, "Kill him! Kill him!"

"Cut out that noise, boy." Mrs. Winder looked at Sammy with surprise. She put the stovelid back in place, and walked toward the kitchen. At the doorway she paused long enough to say to her son, "Get up from there anyhow. I need some coal."

Letting herself breathe easy now, Eunice covered her head with the quilt. The sick feeling, which she had tried to prevent by holding in her stomach, came quickly in spite of her precaution. There surged in her the desire to heave, but as always, she knew she would not.

"Please, God, " she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left.

twelve

Try as she might she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures, all of those faces. She had long ago given up the idea of running away to see new pictures, new faces, as Sammy had so often done. And he never took her. Besides he never thought about his going ahead of time, so it was never planned. It wouldn't have worked anyway. As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the rear of the room always. But what about Marie Zapski? Marie was behind her, but she shared a desk with Angelo Zanno. Her teachers had always treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond. She also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say, "Bobby loves Eunice Winder! Bobby loves Eunice Winder! and never fail to get ~~plax~~ peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused.

It had occurred to Eunice some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights--if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good. and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Winder too. Maybe they'd say "Why

thirteen

look at pretty-eyed Eunice. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.

Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty
eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue
eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs.
They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four
pretty blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like-Mrs.-Forrest's-
blue-blouse-eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes. Alice-and-Jerry-
blue-storybook eyes.

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time.

Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people.

She walks down Garden Avenue to a small grocery store which sells penny candy. Three pennies are in her shoe--between the sock and the inner sole. With each step she feels the painful press of the coins against her foot. A sweet, endurable, even cherished irritation, full of promise and delicate security. There is plenty of time to consider what to buy. Now, however, she moves down an avenue gently buffeted^e_A by the familiar and therefore loved images. The dandelions at the base of the telephone pole. Why, she wonders, do people call them weeds. She thought they were pretty. But grown ups say "Miss Dunion keeps her yard so nice. Not a dandelion anywhere."

fourteen.

Hunkie women in black babushkas go into the fields with baskets to pull them up. But they do not want the yellow heads--only the jagged leaves. They make dandelion soup. Dandelion wine. Nobody loves the head of a dandelion. Maybe because they are so man^y, strong, and soon.

There was the sidewalk crack shaped like a Y and the other one that lifted the concrete up from the dirt floor. Frequently her sloughing step had made her trip ^{over} that one. Skates would go well ^{over} this sidewalk--old it was, and smooth; it made the wheels glide evenly with a mild whirr. The newly paved walks were bumpy and uncomfortable. The sound of skate wheels on new walks was grating.

These and other inanimate things she saw and experienced. They were real to her. She knew them. They were the codes and touchstones of the world, capable of translation and possession. She owned the crack that made her stumble; she owned the clumps of dandelions whose white heads, last fall, she had blown away; whose yellow heads this fall she peered into. And owning them made her part of the world and the world a part of her.

She climbs four wooden steps to the door of Yacobowski's Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries Store. A bell tinkles as she opens it. Standing before the counter she looks at the array of candies. All Mary Janes, she decides. Three for a penny. The resistant sweetness that breaks open at last to deliver peanut butter--the oil and salt ~~of~~ which complements the sweet pull of caramel. A peal of anticipation unsettles her stomach.

She pulls off her shoe and takes out the three pennies. The gray head of Mr. Yacobowski looms up over the counter. He urges his eyes out of his thoughts ^{vvvv vvvvvvv} out of to encounter her. Blue eyes Blear dropped. Slowly like Indian Summer moving imperceptibly toward fall

fifteen

Blue eyes. Blear dropped. Slowly like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Some where between retina and object, between vision and view it draws back, hesitates and hovers. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her because for him there is nothing to see. How can a 52 year old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss see a little black girl. Nothing in his life even suggested that the ^afet₁ was possible not to say desirable or necessary.

"Yeah?" he asks.

She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition--the hovering separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. But this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge, ~~is~~ somewhere in the bottom lid, is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. The# permanency of her blackness, the one thing that will not change, for her girlhood will become womanhood, her childhood will become adulthood. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes. Eunice does not exist, and what does not exist cannot speak. Only her blackness is. But black is the absence of all color. When the negative presence of black is ⁷called upon to speak, it frequently has nothing to say. It can only gesture.

sixteen

She points her finger at the Mary Janes--a little black shaft of finger; its tip pressed on the display window. The quietly inoffensive assertion of a black child's attempt to communicate with a white adult.

"Them." the word is more sigh than sense.

"What? These? These?" Flegm and impatience mingle in his voice.

She shakes her head, her finger tip fixed on the spot which, in her view, at any rate, identifies the Mary Janes. He cannot see her view the angle of his vision the slant of her finger is incomprehensible to him. His lumpy red hand plops around in the glass casing like the agitated head of a chicken outraged by the loss of its body.

"Christ. Kantcha talk?"

His fingers brush the Mary Janes

Shenods.

"Wee! why'nt you say so?" One? How many?"

Eunice unfolds her fist showing the three pennies. He scoots three Mary Janes toward her--three yellow rectangles in each packet. She holds the money toward him. He hesitates, not wanting ^{to} touch her hand. She does not know how to move the finger of her right hand from the display counter or how to get the coins out of her ^{Left} ~~right~~ hand. Finally he reaches over and takes the pennies from her hand. His nails graze her damp palm.

Outside Eunice feels the inexplicable shame ebb.

Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks "They are ugly. They are weeds." Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack. Anger stirs and wakes ⁱⁿ her, it opens its mouth and like a hot ^{breathed} ~~mouthed~~ puppy,

seventeen.

laps up the dredges of her shame.

Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging. Her thoughts fall back to Mr. J. 's eyes, his ^{flegmy} voice. The anger will not hold. the puppy too easily surfeited, its thirst quickly quenched, sleeps. The shame well^e up again, it^s muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes. What to do before the tears come. She remembers the Mary Janes.

Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane. For whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle display blue eyes loo^king at her out of a world of clean comfort. They eyes are petulant, and mischievous. To Eunice they are simply pretty. She eats the candy and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, Eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane.

Three pennies has bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane. Lovely Mary Jane for whom a candy is named.

Part II

To say that Eunice had no friends would be inaccurate. Three ladies of "Endor"; three ~~charms~~ lived in the apartment above. Eunice loved them and they, in turn, were gentle enough not to despise her. These enchanting gargoyles attacked their profession with cheerful chicanery, brutality and an exquisite simplicity that was reflected in their names: Chain, Hooks and Fan. The beauty of each name lay, perhaps, in its direct appeal to the tangible and, therefore, understandable world.

Eunice, that October Saturday when her mother embraced Cholly's head with the stove lid, climbed the stairs to her friends.

Even before Chain opened the door, She could hear Hooks singing:

I got blues in my meal barrell
Blues up on the shelf
I got blues in my meal barrell
Blues up on the shelf
Blues in my bed room
Cause I'm sleepin' by me self

"Hi, Dumplin'. Where're your socks?"

Part II

To say that Eunice had no friends would be inaccurate. ^{There were} Three ladies ^{harlots} of "Endor"; ^{occupying} ~~three chambers~~ lived in the apartment above. Eunice loved them ~~and they, in turn, were gentle enough not to despise her.~~ These ~~enchanted~~ ^{handled} gargoyles ^{with} attacked their profession ^{with} cheerful chicanery, brutality and ^{and insipid} an exquisite simplicity that was reflected in their names: Chain, Hooks and Fan.

The beauty of each name lay, perhaps, in its direct appeal to the tangible and, therefore, understandable world. ^{But they were, nonetheless,} ~~Eunice, that October Saturday when her mother embraced Cholly's head with~~ ^{gentle enough not to despise E} ~~the stove lid, climbed the stairs to her friends.~~ ^{who in turn loved her}

Even before Chain opened the door, She could hear Hooks singing:

I got blues in my meal barrel
Blues up on the shelf
I got blues in my meal barrel
Blues up on the shelf
Blues in my bed room
Cause I'm sleepin' by my self

"Hi, Dumplin'. Where're your socks?"

2.

It would be inaccurate to say that Eunice had no friends. Three whores lived in the apartement above. ^{who} Eunice loved them ~~very much~~, and they, did not despise her. A source of very real pleasure ^{to} was her visits ^{was} to them and ~~being able to~~ run errands for them.

These ^{women} gargoyle ~~fulfilled~~ the obligations of their profession with ~~a~~ liveliness, chicanery and earthy brutality. The simplicity of their attitudes about themselves was reflected in their names: Hooks, Chain and Fan. The beauty and appropriateness of each name lay in the fact that it recalled the tangible, and therefore understandable, world of things which their ~~clients were trying to escape.~~ ^{trade professed to obscure}

Eunice, on that October morning in 1947, the morning of the stove lid triumph, climbed the stairs to visit her friends.

Even before the door was opened to her taps, Eunice could hear Hooks singing: her voice sweet and hard like ~~new~~ ^{juicy} strawberries:

I got blues in my mealbarrel
Blues up on the shelf
I got blues in my mealbarrel
Blues up on the shelf
Blues in my bedroom
Cause I'm sleppin by myself.

"Hi, Dumplin'. Where your socks?" Chain never called Eunice the same thing twice, but invariably her epithets were fond ones chosen from ~~the~~ ^{her} menus and dishes that were forever uppermost in Chain's mind.

"Hello, Miss Chain. Hello Miss Hooks. Hello Miss Fan."

"You heard me. Where're your socks? You as bare-legged as a yard-dog."

"I couldn't find any."

"Couldnt find any? Must be somethin in your house that loves socks."

Hooks and Fan chuckled. Whenever something was missing, Chain attributed its

"Oh, Honey, you've missed half your life. Whoa Jesus one nine five. ~~Dewey Prince. MMMMMMMMMMMM~~. You talkin' bout smooth! I met him when I was fourteen. We ran away together and lived like married for three years. You know all those klunker-tops you see runnin up here? Fifty of em in a bowl wouldnt make a Dewey Prince anklebone. Ah, Lord. How that man loved me."

Fan arranged a fingerful of hair into a bang effect. "Then why he left you to sell tail?"

"Girl, when I found out I could sell it--that somebody would pay cold cash for it, you could have knocked me over with a feather."

Hooks began to laugh. Soundlessly. "Me too. My Aunt whipped me good that first time when I told her I didn't get no money. I said 'Money? For what? He didnt owe me nothin' She said 'The hell he didn't!'"

They all dissolved in laughter.

Three merry ^{gargoyles} ~~witches~~. ^{have many hardships} Amused by a long ago time of ^{ignorance} ~~innocence~~. They did not belong to those generations of prostitutes created in novels, with great and generous hearts, dedicated ^{because} ~~by~~ the horror of circumstance, to ameliorating the luckless barren life of men, taking money incidently and humbly for thier generosity and "understanding." Nor were they from that sensitive breed of young girl, gone wrong at the hands of fate, forced to cultivate an outward brittleness in ~~order~~ to protect her springtime from further shock; But knowing full well she was cut out for better things, and could make the right guy happy. ~~Except for Chain's fabled love for Dewey Prince, these women hated men, all men, without shame, apology or discrimination. They abused their visitors with a hatred~~ Neither were they the sloppy, inadequate whores, who ^{unable to} ~~cant~~ make a living at it alone, and turn to drug consumption ~~or~~ and traffic or pimps to help complete their scheme of self-destruction, avoiding suicide only to punish the memory of some absent father or ^{sustain the} ~~bring~~ misery to of some silent mother. Except for Chain's fabled love for Dewey Prince, these

Eunice went to the window and looked down at the empty street. A melancholy tuft of grass had forced its way up through a crack in the sidewalk only to meet a raw October wind. She thought of Dewey Prince and how he loved Chain. What did love feel like? She wondered. How do grown-ups act when they love each other? Eat fish together? Into her eyes came the picture of Cholly and Mrs. Winder in bed. He making sounds as though he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn't let go. His noises were terrible. But not nearly as bad as the no noise at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence.

Turning her eyes from the window, Eunice ~~watched/Fan~~ looked at the women. Fan had changed her mind about the bangs and was arranging a small, but sturdy pompadour. She was adept in creating any number of hair styles although each one ^{left} gave her ^{with} a pinched and harrassed look. Then she applied makeup heavily. Now she gave herself surprised eyebrows and cupid bow mouth. Later she would make oriental eyebrows and a evilly slashed red mouth. Hooks, in her sweet strawberry voice began ^{another} on her songs:

I know a boy who is sky-soft brown
I know a boy who is sky-soft brown
The dirt leaps for joy when his feet touch the ground

His strut is a peacock
His eye is bruning brass
His smile is sorgum syrup drippin slow-sweet to the last

I know a boy who is sky-soft brown

Chain sat shelling peanuts and popping them into her mouth. ^{Eunice looks and looked at the women.} She belched, softly, purringly, lovingly.

Part Four

ANGUISH. That's a good word. A physician would hardly call it that. Gastro something or other. And of course, in her own field it would be Anxiety. That was probably more accurate than anguish. Psychologists were very intense about semantics, and she had had five years, well, one year anyway, of psychology. But Anguish was more literary. Although one couldn't really deal with a word like anguish, and although anxiety was a familiar comfortable term, nevertheless she preferred to identify the upheaval in her stomach with the more mysterious word.

Now. She pursued the line of thought. Why do I feel Anguish? Because the snow underfoot was crunchy and unyielding. Because the wind resisted movement. Because the icy air makes my eyes water and my toes numb. Wait. Better go back a minute. How do I know I feel anguish? Because I cannot unclench my teeth for more than a few seconds. Because my stomach feels skittery. Better. Dr. would have been proud of that. Application of the principles of logic--to everyday drives. Well, whatever the logical process, this weather was certainly conducive to tension if not suicide. (Why did I say that? Suicide?)

Joan Middleton had seen four of the oppressive winters in that wreck of a town. Why had she remained unacclimated after four years? The weather business must be nonsense. The real reason, she suspected, for her Anguish was the mission she was on, that promised to be so unpleasant. The truth of the matter was that she simply did not relish working with the colored element in the town. There! The thought was out.

"A horrible generalization," she said aloud. Negroes are no different from any other ethnic group. Economic and cultural deprivation was the thing to be despised. That was the...evil. But evil was precisely what she felt. In spite of Dr. Quemada's lectures, in spite of her settlement

home work in the blighted neighborhood of the impacted urban area of Buffalo, she could not really empathize with a group of people who all (every last one) smelled that way, as though dying or even dead, or whose eyes reminded her of the look in the eyes of those water buffaloes in the zoo--dumb but sly. As though they were incapable of thinking malice--only feeling it. But these were bad and unprofessional thoughts. Maybe the real love and understanding for the underprivileged Negro would come later. Anyhow she was doing something to help. Which was more than they themselves did. Besides, she was still new at this. There was time and plenty of room, it seemed, for development in social work. But this job was so much more burdensome than the college days of training in settlement homes and the Buffalo Family Center. Here she was in Family Service, consultant to the elementary school, guidance counselor, and part time truant officer. As a matter of fact, this case was probably a simple matter of truancy. The Winder girl had not been to school for two weeks. The visiting nurse said she was not pregnant (those symptoms were looked for first--you never know with these girls) or ill. ~~So it became automatically a job for Miss Middleton, the town's Resident Psychological Know-It-All.~~

In any case, Joanna knew she would get no reasonable answer from child or parent. The father would scratch his woolly head and say, "Yas'm, I'll git huh dere. Don't know what's wrong wid dese chil'ren." The child would say, "Yes'm" to everything without understanding anything. And she would have to write up some intelligible report about "...latent hostility due to disturbing home elements (translation: parent beat her, or worse, didn't beat her),...inability to adjust (translation: a black fly in a jar of buttermilk) sociopathic..."

The cold crept under Joanna's coat and she pressed her thighs together. She seemed to be a long way from her car, but the wind was behind her now,

and if you can call a store front a house, was right in front of her and confirmed her suspicions about the interview she would have. She knocked on the window of the door. Anyway, it would be warm inside.

Eyes looked out from behind the green cotton that covered the door window. The door opened and a smallish, ugly girl stood there saying absolutely nothing.

"Hello. I'm Miss Middleton. Are you Eunice Winder?"

"Yes 'm." (God! She knew it.)

"May I come in?" she managed a smile. (...accept the child as a person of value.)

Except for the lack of wind it was just as cold in the house as it had been outside.

"Is either of your parents home?"

"No 'm."

"Oh?" (Good. This would not take long.)

"May I sit down?" Joanna moved toward the nearest sofa. (Where are all the 'porr but clean' people? Why did she have to interview only the pigs--correction--only humans can be this dirty)? She glanced into the dimly lit other room and saw a real pot-bellied stove in the middle of the floor. She was about to suggest going in there; it might be warmer; but she got a further glimpse of bed, trunks, and other debris and decided against it.

"Well, now?" Her voice was just cheery enough..accepting, but not familiar. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Eunice looked surprised and then blank.

(My God. She doesn't even know what I'm here for or what I'm talking about.)

"You haven't been to school for two weeks now, Eunice. I'm here to see why."

"Oh."

(Lord. She said that as if it were the last thing of consequence in her world. She might have even said, 'Oh, that!'))

"Why not, Eunice? You aren't sick, are you? The nurse said you were all right."

"Yes 'm."

"Does your mother know you are not coming to school?"

"No 'm. I don't think so."

"You don't think so?"

"She leaves at 6:30 in the mornin'."

"Oh, I see. Well, what about your father?"

"Yes 'm."

"'Yes 'm' what? Does he know?"

"I don't know."

Jesus God. She might just as well go home now and write her report....

"asocial behavior...intelligence range: dull/normal..."

"Eunice. You do know you are supposed to go to school?"

"Yes 'm."

"Then why don't you?"

Eunice lowered her eyes.

"Tell me, Eunice. Why have you stayed out?"

The girl's eyes began to move about. They reminded Joanna of lightning bugs trapped in a jar.

"Answer me. Answer me, Eunice." (Now was the time to be firm.)

"I have to stay home and help my mother."

"But you said your mother went to work at 6:30."

"Yes 'm. I know. But...I mean, I have to keep house while she's gone."

"Then your mother does know you're out of school?"

"Oh, yes 'm."

"Then your mother is making you stay home?"

"Yes 'm. She makin' me. I have to stay home and keep house. I have to clean and fix things while she's gone. So everthing will be nice when she gets home."

"Go on."

SLOW DOWN

"Yes 'm. The beds. The beds have to be fixed. They have to have clean sheets every day. And there's the dishes and the cooking. We eat big suppers when she comes home. And they take a long time to cook, cause there's so much. So much food. We have chicken and lem^{on}merangue pie and cocoa. And then we turn on the radio and listen to the music, WTAM, 620 on the dial..." Eunice was talking too loud; her eyes had settled and focused on something somewhere. "And then I have to take a bath before I go to bed. I put Super Suds in the tub. And then I fill it up with water. All the way to the top. And then I have to get in and sit down in the bubbles. And the bubbles are all colored different. And I have to sit down in them and cover my whole self with them. I can hold Super Suds bubbles in my hand and they don't break. They don't go away; not even if you squeeze them. And Cholly don't come near me, either. He don't like bubbles and water. He don't bother me when I'm in the tub. No 'm. I can't go to school right long in through here. I got too much to do. My friends is always droppin' by and we sit and talk and laugh and I give out Babe Ruth candy bars and we paint our fingernails with Chen Yu 'Dragonsblood'--all except Claudia, she can't wear fingernail polish because she bites her nails way down, besides she's black, you know, and red fingernail polish don't look good on black fingers...."

Joanna felt the words rushing at her like a foul and nauseous wind. The grossness of the lies appalled her. Not even a sensible, plausible lie. She exerted extreme effort to control her disgust; she didn't want to do something she'd regret. It was unbelievable. In the middle of squalor, in the middle of this freezing filth this ugly, pinched-faced, little nigger-girl was conjuring up the silliest lies, lies anybody would detest, not only a professional social-worker, just to keep from going to school. It was maddening. Insulting. Here she was trying hard to keep away from the stereotype generalizations and this girl was reducing the whole point of social therapy to ashes. Well, not quite. Dr. Quesada had said that while the stereotype was not accurate, neither was it false. One characteristic, she knew, of all Negroes was their inability to face reality. Their preference, come what may, was for some backward fairy tale existence. Like that play about Negroes where heaven was a great big Fish Fry. And here this one, at eleven or twelve years old (it was hard to tell--they all looked the same age) would rather paint her fingernails than go to school, get an education and be somebody. Anything to avoid work. Anything to avoid responsibility. God knows she had not been allowed to quit anything. She had got an education and it had been no picnic!

Joanna tasted her anger at the back of her tongue.

"Eunice."

"...a blue one with a white collar and I gave Claudia a green one..."

"Eunice!" Stop it."

"...because she is my best friend..."

"Stop it and listen to me!" Joanna grabbed Eunice by the shoulders and looked into those fierce bright eyes. She was touching her. Touching her black arms, looking into those strange eyes. She could smell her,

that funny "colored" smell. Something happened. Joanna wasn't disgusted any more. She held the girl's arm tighter. I want to help her, she thought, surprised. Maybe this once, this once, just this once I can do something. Maybe this is the understanding and empathy she was told to develop. She really wanted to help her.

She looked into those eyes steadily.

"You are not telling the truth. Maybe you would like it to be true, but it isn't."

Eunice looked at her. "Ma'am?"

"I said you are lying."

Eunice stared back.

Oh God, help me, Joanna pleaded. Help me cut through all the nonsense, all the environmental factors. Help me get to the point. Help me to let a ray of hope, a ray of truth into that forehead. A bright thin ray of reality. Shock therapy. Pull her up short. That is what is needed. These poor people. This poor girl. Either ignored, brutalized, or patronized. That is what they have gotten so far. Too few dared to tell them the truth, the facts of life: that lazy was lazy, that sin was sin, that truth was truth. So, they never knew. But this one, God help her, would know. She would make her know.

"Eunice." Joanna was calm now.

"Ma'am?"

"You are lying."

"No'm. I really have to..."

"You are lying. There are no fine dinners. There are no friends dropping by. There are no clean sheets on your bed every day. You don't take bubble baths. You probably don't even have a bathtub."

Eunice's eyes looked haunted.

Joanna's breath was easier now. The pure sweet truth was going to come out purely and sweetly. "The important thing is to know what is true. Not to live in a make-believe world. Not to make excuses to yourself. Be honest with yourself. Really honest. Look around you. See? This is a piano. That Christmas tree over there. It is artificial. It is not real. Just like that lemon pie, those clean sheets, and those bubble baths. Now, you don't take bubble baths, do you?"

God. The eyes. The eyes were awful. Ugly and stupid. She would penetrate that look or die!

"No. Of course not." Joanna knelt down on one knee. She still held the girl's arms. "Now I'm going to tell you something very important. Maybe the most important thing you'll ever hear. Stop making excuses for yourself, and start making something of yourself. Look. I know what it is like to be a Negro. I've seen plenty of them. I know it's no picnic. But other Negroes have made it. There is Booker T. Washington, and Marian Anderson and...and Lena Horne. They didn't make excuses. They did something. Do you want to know how they did it? They were honest with themselves. They lived in the real world. Don't you see?"

Joanna felt as though she were going to cry. It was so important.

"Eunice. You can't stay away from school and make up lies about yourself. You must try to be somebody. Think of the things you could do for your race!"

Now the tears did fall. Joanna did not even feel shame. She let the tears fall with almost exultation. She stood up. The knee on which she had knelt was stiff and soon began to tingle. She put her hand into her coat pocket to find a tissue. There were none. She used the back

of her glove to wipe away the tears. She smiled down at the small bowed head. "Remember," Joanna's voice was whisper soft. "Life is not easy but whatever we do we have to do in the real world. Now promise me, Eunice, that whatever you say from now on will be the truth. Lies won't help you, Eunice. Lies won't help at all. You people have got to face reality!"

Joanna picked up her handbag and her manila folder. She tiptoed toward the door, opened it quietly. She could not hazard a backward glance at that small bowed woolly head for fear she would cry again.

The cold air quickly defined the wet places on her face. She turned fearlessly into the howling, strident wind.

Standing at the door of her car, key in hand, Joanna glanced at the sky. The moon. There it was like an old pearl. A piece of jewelry. She smiled. An old pearl to wear on my black wool dress. A lovely jewel to crown her victory. Those were nice words: jewel, crown, victory. There was no tension, no Anguish now. She felt relief and a sense of belonging.

At last, she thought. One something done. One somebody in a heap of nobodys saved. And by me. That was what was meant by "the subjective reward of objective accomplishment."

The wind could tear at her back all it liked. She would wear the moon on her black wool dress. Right over her left breast.

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Att: TO HE WHO GREATLY ENNOBLED HUMAN NATURE BY CREATING IT

Dear-Lord,

Dear God, (n.b. The use of the halfstop after the greeting. This is a Friendly Letter.)

(On the contrary. This is a Business Letter!)

Dear God:

The Purpose of this letter is to familiarize you with facts which either have escaped your notice, or which you have chosen to ignore. Doubtless there will be repetitions (for you are not altogether oblivious of this case--I understand there is something fairly accurate ^a bout "He chasteneth whom He loveth"--) but, equally doubtless, there will be new insights, new evidence and, most relevant, new developments, which, providing you are willing to suspend prejudice and rely on unequivocal, indisputable data, ought to lead you to a judgment that is both fair and just.

In the interests of scholarship--and for the efficiency of the record-keeper (no less than my love for logic) I begin where you did: at the beginning.

Once upon a time I lived greenly and youngish on one of your islands. An island of the archipelago in the ^{South} North Atlantic between North and South America, enclosing the Carribean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico: divided into the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles, and the Bahama Islands. Not the Windward or Leeward Island Colonies, mark you, but within, of course, the Greater of the two Antilles (while the precision of my prose may be, at times, laborious, it is necessary that I identify myself to you clearly.)

In this once upon a greater time I was nonetheless a lad
from these Greater Antilles. Perhaps if I'd been from the Lesser
of the two Antilles, or been even a lesser lad from the Greater
Antilles, I would never have been the least of little men.
to you
^

Now.

We, in this colony, took as our own, the most dramatic, and the
most obvious of our white master's characteristics, which were,
of course, their worst. In retaining the identity of our race, we
held fast to those characteristics most gratifying to sustain and
least troublesome to maintain. Consequently we were not royal but
snobbish; not aristocratic but class conscious; we believed author-
ity was cruelty to our inferiors, and education was being at school.
We mistook violence for passion, indolence for leisure, and thought
recklessness was freedom. We raised our children and reared our
crops; we let infants grow and property develop. Our manhood
was defined by acquisitions. Our womanhood by acquiescence. And
the smell of your fruit and the labour of your days we abhorred.

Shall I tell you how little she loved me? You suspect. You
could hardly know.

This morning, before the little black girl came, I cried--for
Velma. Oh, not aloud. There is no wind to carry, bear, or even
refuse to bear, a sound so heavy with regret. But in my silent own
lone way, I cried--for Velma. Did I ever tell you how little she
loved me? What am I to do with these uncried tears? Uncry? Uncry?
You needs must know about Velma to understand what I did today.

She (Velma) left me the way people leave a hotel room. A
hotel room is a place to be when you are doing something else. Of

itself it is of no consequence to one's major scheme. A hotel room is convenient. But its convenience is limited to the time you need it while you are in that particular town on that particular business: you hope it is comfortable, but prefer, rather, that it be anonymous. It is not, after all where you live.

When you no longer need it, you pay a little something for its use; say thank you, sir, and when your business in that town is over, you go away from that room. Does anybody regret leaving a hotel room? Does anybody, who has a home, a real home somewhere, want to stay there? Does anybody look back with affection or even disgust, at a hotel room when they leave it? You can only love or despise whatever living was done in that room. But the room itself?-- But you take a souvenir. Not, oh not, to remember the room. To remember rather the time and the place of your business, your adventure. What can anyone feel for a hotel room? One doesn't any more feel for a hotel room than one expects a hotel room to feel for its occupant.

That, Heavenly heavenly Father, was how she left me: she never ^{OK RATHER} ~~ever~~ left me because she was never ever there. _^

Someday, perhaps I shall tell you how I loved her. About how anxious I was that she keep her good opinion of herself. About the kindness that radiated from the gentle protrusion of her belly. About the tenderness I felt for her whenever she was publicly stupid. For the moment, suffice it to say how little, lesser, least, she lovelittled me.

You remember, do you, how and of what we are made? Let me tell you now about the breasts of little girls. Consider, dear Love, Velma and the Greater Antilles--how could I not have loved them?

How they beckoned. But I apologize, formally, for whatever it is necessary to apologize for in that area. (What is the area anyway--Sodomy?) I apologize for the inappropriateness (is that it?), the imbalance of loving them at awkward times of day, and in awkward places, and the tastelessness of loving those which belonged to members of my family. Do I have to apologize for loving strangers?

But you too are amiss here, Lord. How, why, did you allow it to happen? How is it I could lift my eyes from the contemplation of Your Body and fall deeply into the contemplation of theirs? The buds. The buds on some of these saplings. They were mean, you know, mean and tender. Mean little buds resisting the touch, springing like rubber. But aggressive. Daring me to touch. Commanding me to touch. Not a bit shy, as you'd suppose. They stuck out at me, oh yes, at me. Slender chested finger-chested lassies. Have you ever seen them, Lord? I mean really seen them. One could not see them, and not love them. You who made them must have considered them lovely even as an idea--how much more lovely is the manifestation of that idea. I couldn't, as you must recall, keep my hands, my mouth, off of them. Nor would I. Nor should I. Salt sweet. Like not quite ripe strawberries covered with the light salt sweat of running days and hopping skipping jumping hours.

I say, I'd have been a rotten, not to say curious, rector. Can you see me at Sunday-school? Papa never looked. He would smile, pat their heads, and give them cough drops when they knew their lesson well. Just for the record, MY PAPA WAS A VERY FINE, VERY FINE ~~RECTOR!~~ ^{SCHOOL MASTER}

still, but they--the love of them--the touch, taste and feel of them--were not just an easy luxurious human vice; they were, for me, A Thing To Do Instead. Instead of Papa, instead of the Cloth, instead of Velma, and I chose not to do without them. Did You know that? Pap^a didn't. Pap^a cried. Papa died. But I didn't go into the church. At least I didn't do that. As to what I did do? I told people I knew all about You. That I had received Your Powers. It was not a complete lie; but it was a complete lie. I should never have, I admit, I should never have taken their money in exchange for well-phrased, well-placed, well-faced lies. But, mark you, I hated it. Not for a moment did I love the lies or the money.

But consider: the woman who left the hotel room.

Consider: the greentime, the noontime of the Archipelago.

Consider: Their hopeful eyes that were outdone only by their hoping breasts.

Consider: how I needed a comfortable evil to prevent my knowing what I could not bear to know.

Consider: how I hated and despised the money.

And now, Consider: not according to my just deserts, but according to my mercy, the little black girl that came a looning at me ^{Today} ~~this~~ ~~morning~~. Tell me, Lord, how could you leave a lass so long so lone ^{that} she could find her way to me? How could you? I weep for you, Lord. I weep for You. And it is because I weep for You, that I had to do your work for You.

Do you know what she came for? Blue eyes. New, blue eyes, she said. Like she was buying shoes. "I'd like a pair of new blue eyes."

She must have asked ^{unfor them} ~~her~~ for ^{very} a long time, and you hadn't replied.
(A habit, I could have told her, a long ago habit broken for
Job--but no more.) She came to me for them. She had one of my
cards. (Card enclosed.) By the way, I added the Micah--Micah
Elihue Whitcomb. But I am called Soaphead Church. I cannot
remember how or why I got the name. What makes one name more a
person than another? Is the name the real thing then? And the
person only what his name says? Is that why to the simplest and
friendliest of questions: "What is your name?" put to you by Moses,
You would not say and said instead "I am that I am." Like Popeye?
I Yam What I Yam? Afraid you were, weren't you, to give out your
name. Afraid they would know the name and then know you? Then
they wouldn't fear you? It's quite all right. ^{Don't be vexed} I mean no offense.
I understand. I have been a bad man too, and an unhappy man too.
But someday I will die. I was always so kind. ^{Why do} ~~How come~~ I have to
die? The little girls. The little girls are the only things I'll
miss. Do you know that when I touched their sturdy little tits
and bit them--just a little--I felt--I was being--friendly? I
didn't want to kiss their mouths or sleep in the bed with them or
take a child bride for my own. Playful, I felt, and friendly.
Not like the newspapers said. ^{Not like the people who spoke} And they didn't mind at all. Not
at all. Remember how so many of them came back? No one would
even try to understand that. If I'd been hurting them, would they
have come back? Two of them, Doreen and Sugar Babe, they'd come
together. I gave them mints, money, and they'd eat ice cream with
their legs open while I played with them. It was like a party.
And there wasn't nastiness and there wasn't any filth and there

wasn't any colour and there wasn't any groaning--just the light white laughter of little girls and me. And there wasn't any look--any long funny look--any long funny Velma look afterward. No look that makes you feel dirty afterward. That makes you want to die. With little girls it is all clean and good and friendly.

You have to understand that, Lord. You said suffer little children to come unto me and harm them not. Did you forget? Did you forget about the children? Yes. You ~~forgot~~. You let them go wanting, sit on road shoulders, ~~in war pictures~~, crying next to their dead mothers. I've seen them charred, lame, halt. You forgot, Lord. You forgot how and when to be God.

That's why I changed the little black girl's eyes for her, and I didn't touch her; not a finger did I lay on her. But I gave her those blue eyes she wanted. Not for pleasure ~~this time~~ and not for money. I did what You did not, could not, would not do: I looked at that ugly little black girl ~~E. W.~~ and I loved her. I played You. And it was a very good show!

I said the Magic Words. Right straight through ~~t~~ this time. ~~Our~~ (who is "our"? Everybody, I suppose. Not just the Queen's. Not just Papa's. Everybody's.) Father (are You a man? Some people say You are a woman. Lifegiver, life destroyer. Are You sexless? Why of course You are a man. Maleness is superior. Only men can convince males that they are men. Only men can convince females that they are women. Therefore manness is needed, worshipped, by everybody.) Who are (present tense. You are still.) in Heaven (where is heaven? Why are You there and not here? Or is this Heaven? What a nice sound that word has, H e a v e n) Hallowed (precious. Holy. Not to be trifled with) be Thy name (What on earth

is your name? Yaweh. Ywh. No consonants. No names. That is why it is hallowed. Nobody knows it.) Thy kingdom come (going to come? Here? Thy kingdom has already come?) ~~Thy~~ will be done (only thine. Are there any other wills to be done? ¹⁵ God's will is preferable to man's will.) on earth as it is in heaven (is this a plea? A statement of fact? You mean all this sorrow is Your will? I cannot do Your will because I do not know it. And what I know of it I do not like.) Give us this day (one at a time, one at a time) our daily bread (sustenance. Do you know what hunger is like? It is not lack of food. It is having only enough for one day, that one day and nothing left for tomorrow. Can I trust You? Will You give me sustenance for a whole week together? Or must I ask You every day, every day one day at a time. Is it good to thee that thou shouldst oppress? Or just lest we forget? What is Man that thou ^{are} mindful of him? Hast thou eyes of flesh? Are thy days as the days of Man? No. You do not know what hunger can do. What is Man that thou art mindful of him? Indeed. Indeed.) And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass (only as? If we do not forgive, we are not forgiven. All right. I agree to that ^{part}.) against us. (What about those who trespass against others? I can readily forgive those who hurt me, but I cannot forgive those who harm strangers I have not known.) But lead us not (would You lead us, lead Your children?) into temptation (into temptation? What are You testing us for? Having survived the womb, have we further testing to undergo? Isn't that enough? We have been born, man! You have given us life. Hast thou not

poor? ... Are not my
days few? Cease, then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort
a little, before I go whence I shall not return!) and deliver us
from evil (Oh You who created Evil, deliver us from It and You.)
Amen. (I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.)

ATTENTION: YOU WHO ENNOBLED HUMAN NATURE BY CREATING IT:

I, I have caused a miracle. I gave her the eyes. I gave her the
blue, blue, two blue eyes. Cobalt blue. A streak of it right out
of your own blue heaven. Silence! Silence! No one else will see her
blue eyes. But she will. And she will live happily ever after.
I, I have found it meet and right so to do.

Now you are jealous. You are jealous of me. But I'm going to
die anyway, and be damned anyway (because of the little girls?
because of Papa?) But now I can die good because now I can die God.

You see? I, too, have created. Not aboriginally, like you, but
Creation is a heady wine, more for the Taster than the Brewer.

Having therefore, imbibed, as it were, of the nectar, I am not
afraid of You, of Death, not even of Life, and it's all right about
Velma; and it's all right about Papa; and it's all right about the
Greater and the Lesser Antilles. Quite all right. Quite.

With kindest regards, I remain,

Your

Micah Elihue Whitecomb

*Footed -
please letter
he ran from the table
lay down on his back
and fell back on
and slipped into
an ivory sleep.*

Soaphead Church folded the sheets of paper into three equal parts and slipped them into an envelope. Although he had no seal he longed for sealing wax. He removed a cigar box from under the bed and rumaged about in it. There were some of his most precious things: a sliver of jade, that had dislodged from a cuff link at the Chicago hotel, a gold pendant shaped like a Y with a piece of coral attached to it that had belonged to the mother he never knew; four large hairpins that Velma had left on the rim of the bathroom sink, a powder blue grograin ribbon from the head of a little girl named Precious Jewel, a blackened faucet head from ~~xxxx~~ the sink in a jail cell in Cincinnati, two marbels he had found under a bench in Morningside Park on a very fine Spring Day; an old Lucky Hart catalogue that smelled still of nut brown and mocha face powder and lemon vanishing cream. Distracted by his things, he forgot what he had been looking for. The effort to recall was too great; there was a buzzing in his head and a wash of fatigue overcame him. He closed his box, ~~and xxx and~~ eased himself out on the bed ~~and~~ slipping into an ivory sleep from which he could not hear the tiny yelps of an old lady who had come out of her candy store and found the still carcass of an old dog named Bob.

PART SEVEN

How many times a minute are you going to look inside that old thing?

I didn't look in a long time.

You did too-

So what? I can look if I want to.

I didn't say you couldn't. I just don't know why you have to look every minute. They aren't going anywhere.

I know it. I just like to look.

You scared they might go away?

Of course not. How can they go away?

The others went away.

They didn't go away. They changed.

Go away. Change. What's the difference?

A lot. Mr. Soaphead said they would last forever.

Forever and ever Amen?

Yes, if you want to know.

You don't have to be so smarty when you talk to me.

I'm not being smarty. You started it.

I'd just like to do something else besides watch you stare in that mirror.

You're just jealous.

I am not.

You are. You wish you had them.

Ha. What would I look like with blue eyes?

Nothing much.

If you're going to keep this up, I may as well go on off by myself.

No. Don't go. What you want to do?

I don't know. Go outside and play, I guess.

But it's cold.

You can take your old mirror. Put it in your coat pocket and you can look at yourself up and down the street.

Boy! I never would have thought you'd be so jealous.

Oh, come on!

Admit it.

Admit what?

That you're jealous.

Okay. So I'm jealous.

See. I told you.

No. I told you.

Are they really nice?

Yes. Very nice.

Just "very nice"?

Really, truly, very nice.

Really, truly, blusely nice?

Oh God. You are crazy.

I am not!

I didn't mean it that way.

Well, what did you mean?

Put your coat on. It's too hot in here.

Wait a minute. I can't find my gloves.

Here they are.

Oh. Thank you.

Got your mirror?

Yes dearie...

Well let's go then...Ow!

What's the matter?

The sun is too bright. When it shines on the snow it hurts my eyes.
Not mine. I don't even blink. Look. I can look right at the sun.
Don't do that.

Why not? It doesn't hurt. I don't even have to blink.

Well, blink anyway. You make me feel funny, staring at the sun like that.

Feel funny how?

I don't know.

Yes you do. Feel funny how?

I told you I don't know.

Why don't you look at me when you say that? You're looking drop-eyed like Mrs. Winder.

Mrs. Winder look drop-eyed at you?

Yes. Now she does. Ever since I got my blue eyes, she look away from me all of the time. Do you suppose she's jealous too?

Could be. They are pretty, you know.

I know. He really did a good job. Everybody's jealous. Every time I look at somebody they look off.

Is that why nobody has told you how pretty they are?

Sure it is. Can you imagine? Something like that happening to a person, and nobody but nobody saying anything about it? They all try to pretend they don't see them. Isn't that funny? I said isn't that funny?

Yes.

You are the only one who tells me how pretty they are.

Yes.

You are a real friend. I'm sorry about picking on you before. I mean saying you were jealous and all.

That's all right.

No. Really. You are my very best friend. Why didn't I know you before?

You didn't want me before.

Didn't want you?

I mean...you were so unhappy before. I guess you didn't notice me before.

I guess you're right. And I was so lonely for friends. And you were right here. Right before my eyes.

No, honey. Right after your eyes.

What?

What does Joanna think about your eyes?

She doesn't say anything about them. Has she said anything to you about them?

No. Nothing.

Do you like Joanna?

Oh. She's all right. For a white girl, that is.

I know what you mean. But would you like to be her friend? I mean would you like to go around with her or anything?

No.

Me neither. But she sure is popular.

Who wants to be popular?

Not me.

Me neither.

But you couldn't be popular any way. You don't even go to school.

You don't either.

I know. But I used to.

What did you stop for?

They made me.

Who made you?

I don't know. After that first day at school when I had my blue eyes? Well, the next day they had Mrs. Winder come out. Now I don't go any more. But I don't care.

You don't?

No, I don't. They're just prejudiced, that's all.

Yes, they sure are prejudiced.

Just because I got blue eyes, bluer than theirs, they're prejudiced.

That's right.

They are bluer, aren't they?

Oh yes. Much bluer.

Bluer than Joanna's?

Much bluer than Joanna's.

And bluer than Michelena's?

Much bluer than Michelena's.

I thought so. Did Michelena say anything to you about my eyes?

No. Nothing.

Did you say anything to her?

No.

How come?

How come what?

How come you don't talk to anybody?

I talk to you.

Besides me.

I don't like anybody besides you.

Where do you live?

I told you once.

What is your mother's name?

Why are you so busy meddling me?

I just wondered. You don't talk to anybody. You don't go to school. And nobody talks to you.

How do you know nobody talks to me?

They don't. When you're in the house with me, even Mrs. Winder doesn't say anything to you. Ever. Sometimes I wonder if she even sees you.

Why wouldn't she see me?

I don't know. She almost walks right over you.

Maybe she doesn't feel too good since Cholly's gone.

Oh yes. You must be right.

She probably misses him.

I don't know why she would. All he did was get drunk and beat her up.

Well you know how grown ups are.

Yes. No. How are they?

Well she probably loved him anyway.

HIM?

Sure. Why not? Anyway, if she didn't love him she sure let him do it to her a lot.

That's nothing.

How do you know?

I say them all the time. She didn't like it.

Then why'd she let him do it to her?

Because he made her.

How could somebody make you do something like that?

Easy.

Oh yeah? How easy?

They just make you, that's all.

I guess you're right. And Cholly could make anybody do anything.

He could not.

He made you, didn't he?

Shut up!

I was only teasing.

Shut up!

Okay. Okay.

He just tried, see? He didn't do anything. You hear me?

I'm shutting up.

You'd better. I don't like that kind of talk.

I said I'm shutting up.

You always talk so dirty. Who told you about that anyway?

I forget.

Sammy?

No. You did.

I did not.

You did. You said he tried to do it to you when you were sleeping on the couch.

See there! You don't even know what you're talking about. It was when I was in the tub!

Oh yes. The tub.

By myself. In the tub.

Well, I'm glad you didn't let him.

Yes.

Did you?

Did I what?

Let him.

Now who's crazy.

I am I guess.

You sure are.

Still...

Well. Go ahead. Still what?

I wonder what it would be like.

Horrible.

Really?

Yes. Horrible.

Then why didn't you tell Mrs. Winder?

I did tell her!

I don't mean about the first time. I mean about the second time,
when you were reading on the couch.

I wasn't reading. I was sleeping.

You don't have to shout.

You don't understand anything, do you? She didn't believe me when
I told her.

So that's why you didn't tell her about the second time?

She wouldn't have believed me then either.

You're right. No use telling her when she wouldn't believe you.

That's what I'm trying to get through your thick head.

Okay. I understand now. Just about.

What do you mean just about?

You sure are mean today.

You keep on saying mean and sneaky things. I thought you were my
friend.

I am. I am.

Then leave me alone about Cholly.

Okay.

There's nothing more to say about him, anyway. He's gone anyway.

Yes. Good riddance.

Yes. Good riddance.

And Sammy's gone too.

And Sammy's gone too.

So there's no use talking about it. I mean them.

No. No use at all.

It's all over now.

Yes.

And you don't have to be afraid of Cholly coming at you any more.

No.

That was horrible, wasn't it?

Yes.

The second time too?

Yes.

Really? The second time too?

Leave me alone! You better leave me alone.

Can't you take a joke? I was only funning.

I don't like to talk about dirty things.

Me neither. Let's talk about something else.

What? What will we talk about?

Why, your eyes.

Oh yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again.

See how pretty they are.

Yes. They get prettier each time I look at them.

They are the prettiest I've ever seen.

Really?

Oh yes.

Prettier than the sky?

Oh yes. Much prettier than the sky.

Prettier than Alice and Jerry Storybook eyes?

Oh yes. Much prettier than Alice and Jerry Storybook eyes.

And prettier than Joanna's?

Oh yes. And bluer too.

Bluer than Michelena's?

Yes.

Are you sure?

Of course I'm sure.

You don't sound sure.

Well I'm sure. Unless...

Unless what?

Oh nothing. I was just thinking, about a lady I saw yesterday.
Her eyes sure were blue. But no. Not bluer than yours.

Are you sure?

Yes. I remember them now. Yours are bluer.

I'm glad.

Me too. I'd hate to think that there was anybody around with
bluer eyes than yours. I'm sure there isn't. Not around here
anyway.

But you don't know, do you? You haven't seen everybody, have you?

No. I haven't.

So there could be, couldn't there?

Not hardly.

But maybe. Maybe. You said "around here." Nobody "around here"
probably has bluer eyes. What about someplace else? Even if my
eyes are bluer than Joanna's and bluer than Michelena's and bluer
than that Lady's you saw, suppose there is somebody way off somewhere
with bluer eyes than mine?

Don't be silly.

There could be. Couldn't there?

Not hardly.

But suppose. Suppose a long way off. In Cincinnati, say, there
is somebody whose eyes are bluer than mine? Suppose there are two
people with bluer eyes?

So what? You asked for blue eyes. You got blue eyes.

He should have made them bluer.

Who.

Mr. Soaphead.

Did you say what color blue you wanted them?

No. I forgot.

Oh. Well.

Look. Look over there. At that girl. Look at her eyes. Are they bluer than mine?

No. I don't think so.

Did you look real good?

Yes.

Here comes someone. Look at his. See if they're bluer.

You're being silly. I'm not going to look at everybody's eyes.

You have to.

No I don't.

Please. If there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is somebody with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the whole world.

That's just too bad, isn't it?

Please help me look.

No.

But suppose my eyes aren't blue enough?

Blue enough for what?

Blue enough for...I don't know. Blue enough for something. Blue enough for you!

I'm not going to play with you any more.

Oh. Don't leave me.

Yes. I am.

Why? Are you mad at me?

Yes.

Because my eyes aren't blue enough? Because I don't have the bluest eyes?

No. Because you're acting silly.

Don't go. Don't leave me.

Will you come back if I get them?

Get what?

The bluest eyes. Will you come back then?

Of course I will. I'm just going away for a little while.

You promise?

Sure. I'll be back. Right before your very eyes.

THE END

→ All caps, no spaces bet. words, no punct.

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12

44

~~SECRET~~

How many times a minute are you going to look inside that old thing?

I didn't look in a long time.

You did too--

So what? I can look if I want to.

[I didn't say you couldn't. I just don't know why you have to look every minute. They aren't going anywhere.]

I know it. I just like to look.

You scared they might go away?

Of course not. How can they go away?

The others went away.

They didn't go away. They changed.

Go away. Change. What's the difference?

A lot. Mr. Soaphead said they would last forever.

Forever and ever Amen?

Yes, if you want to know.

You don't have to be so smarty when you talk to me.

I'm not being smarty. You started it.

I'd just like to do something else besides watch you stare in that mirror.

You're just jealous.

I am not.

You are. You wish you had them.

Ha. What would I look like with blue eyes?

Nothing much.

If you're going to keep this up, I may as well go on off by myself.

No. Don't go. What you want to do?

→ We could go outside and play, I guess.

But it's too hot.

You can take your old mirror. Put it in your coat pocket and you can look at yourself up and down the street.

Boy! I never would have thought you'd be so jealous.

Oh, come on!

~~You are~~
Admit it.

~~me~~
Admit what?

~~That you're~~ jealous.

Okay. So I'm jealous.

See. I told you.

No. I told you.

Are they really nice?

Yes. Very nice.

Just "very nice"?

Really, truly, very nice.

Really, truly, bluely nice?

Oh God. You are crazy.

I am not!

I didn't mean it that way.

Well, what did you mean?

~~Put your coat on.~~ ^{Come on} It's too hot in here.

~~Wait a minute.~~ I can't find my ^{shoes} ~~gloves~~.

Here they are.

Oh. Thank you.

Got your mirror?

Yes dearie...

Well let's go then...Ow!

What's the matter?

The sun is too bright. ~~When it shines on the snow it hurts my eyes.~~
Not mine. I don't even blink. Look. I can look right at the sun.
Don't do that.

Why not? It doesn't hurt. I don't even have to blink.

Well, blink anyway. You make me feel funny, staring at the sun like that.

Feel funny how?

I don't know.

Yes you do. Feel funny how?

I told you I don't know.

Why don't you look at me when you say that? You're looking drop-eyed like Mrs. Winder. *Breedlove*

Mrs. Winder look drop-eyed at you?

Yes. Now she does. Ever since I got my blue eyes, she look away from me all of the time. Do you suppose she's jealous too?

Could be. They are pretty, you know.

I know. He really did a good job. Everybody's jealous. Every time I look at somebody they look off.

Is that why nobody has told you how pretty they are?

Sure it is. Can you imagine? Something like that happening to a person, and nobody but nobody saying anything about it? They all try to pretend they don't see them. Isn't that funny? I said isn't that funny?

Yes.

You are the only one who tells me how pretty they are.

Yes.

You are a real friend. I'm sorry about picking on you before. I mean saying you were jealous and all.

That's all right.

No. Really. You are my very best friend. Why didn't I know you before?

You didn't want me before.

Didn't want you?

I mean...you were so unhappy before. I guess you didn't notice me before.

I guess you're right. And I was so lonely for friends. And you were right here. Right before my eyes.

No, honey. Right after your eyes.

What?

What does ^{MURKIN} Jeanna think about your eyes?

She doesn't say anything about them. Has she said anything to you about them?

No. Nothing.

Do you like ^{MURKIN} Jeanna?

Oh. She's all right. For a white girl, that is.

I know what you mean. But would you like to be her friend? I mean would you like to go around with her or anything?

No.

Me neither. But she sure is popular.

Who wants to be popular?

Not me.

Me neither.

But you couldn't be popular any way. You don't even go to school.

You don't either.

I know. But I used to.

What did you stop for?

They made me.

Who made you?

I don't know. After that first day at school when I had my blue eyes? Well, the next day they had Mrs. Winder come out. Now I don't go any more. But I don't care.

You don't?

No, I don't. They're just prejudiced, that's all.

Yes, they sure are prejudiced.

Just because I got blue eyes, bluer than theirs, they're prejudiced.

That's right.

They are bluer, aren't they?

Oh yes. Much bluer.

Bluer than Joanna's?

Much bluer than Joanna's.

And bluer than Michelena's?

Much bluer than Michelena's.

I thought so. Did Michelena say anything to you about my eyes?

No. Nothing.

Did you say anything to her?

No.

How come?

How come what?

How come you don't talk to anybody?

I talk to you.

Besides me.

I don't like anybody besides you.

Where do you live?

I told you once.

What is your mother's name?

Why are you so busy meddling me?

I just wondered. You don't talk to anybody. You don't go to school. And nobody talks to you.

How do you know nobody talks to me?

They don't. When you're in the house with me, even Mrs. Winder doesn't say anything to you. Ever. Sometimes I wonder if she even sees you.

Why wouldn't she see me?

I don't know. She almost walks right over you.

Maybe she doesn't feel too good since Cholly's gone.

Oh yes. You must be right.

She probably misses him.

I don't know why she would. All he did was get drunk and beat her up.

Well you know how grown ups are.

Yes. No. How are they?

Well she probably loved him anyway.

HIM?

Sure. Why not? Anyway, if she didn't love him she sure let him do it to her a lot.

That's nothing.

How do you know?

I saw them all the time. She didn't like it.

Then why'd she let him do it to her?

Because he made her.

How could somebody make you do something like that?

Easy.

Oh yeah? How easy?

They just make you, that's all.

I guess you're right. And Cholly could make anybody do anything.

He could not.

He made you, didn't he?

Shut up!

I was only teasing.

Shut up!

Okay. Okay.

He just tried, see? He didn't do anything. You hear me?

I'm shutting up.

You'd better. I don't like that kind of talk.

I said I'm shutting up.

You always talk so dirty. Who told you about that anyway?

I forget.

Sammy?

No. You did.

I did not.

You did. You said he tried to do it to you when you were ~~sleeping~~ ^{washing} dishes on the couch.

See there! You don't even know what you're talking about. It was when I was ~~in the tub!~~ ^{washing dishes}

Oh yes. The ~~tub.~~ ^{dishes}

By myself. In the ~~tub.~~ ^{Kitchen}

Well, I'm glad you didn't let him.

Yes.

Did you?

Did I what?

Let him.

Now who's crazy.

I am I guess.

You sure are.

Still...

Well. Go ahead. Still what?

I wonder what it would be like.

Horrible.

Really?

Yes. Horrible.

Then why didn't you tell Mrs. Winder?

I did tell her!

I don't mean about the first time. I mean about the second time,
when you were ^{reading} ~~reading~~ on the couch.

I wasn't ~~steeping~~ ^{sleeping}. I was ~~sleeping~~ ^{reading}.

You don't have to shout.

You don't understand anything, do you? She didn't ^{even} believe me when
I told her.

So that's why you didn't tell her about the second time?

She wouldn't have believed me then either.

You're right. No use telling her when she wouldn't believe you.

That's what I'm trying to get through your thick head.

Okay. I understand now. Just about.

What do you mean just about?

You sure are mean today.

You keep on saying mean and sneaky things. I thought you were my
friend.

I am. I am.

Then leave me alone about Cholly.

Okay.

There's nothing more to say about him, anyway. He's gone anyway.

Yes. Good riddance.

Yes. Good riddance.

And Sammy's gone too.

And Sammy's gone too.

So there's no use talking about it. I mean them.

No. No use at all.

It's all over now.

Yes.

And you don't have to be afraid of Cholly coming at you any more.

No.

That was horrible, wasn't it?

Yes.

The second time too?

Yes.

Really? The second time too?

Leave me alone! You better leave me alone.

Can't you take a joke? I was only funning.

I don't like to talk about dirty things.

Me neither. Let's talk about something else.

What? What will we talk about?

Why, your eyes.

Oh yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again.

See how pretty they are.

Yes. They get prettier each time I look at them.

They are the prettiest I've ever seen.

Really?

Oh yes.

Prettier than the sky?

Oh yes. Much prettier than the sky.

Prettier than Alice and Jerry Storybook eyes?

Oh yes. Much prettier than Alice and Jerry Storybook eyes.

And prettier than Joanna's?

Oh yes. And bluer too.

Bluer than Michelena's?

Yes.

Are you sure?

Of course I'm sure.

You don't sound sure...
Well ^{I Am} sure. Unless...

Unless what?

Oh nothing. I was just thinking, about a lady I saw yesterday.
Her eyes sure were blue. But no. Not bluer than yours.

Are you sure?

Yes. I remember them now. Yours are bluer.

I'm glad.

Me too. I'd hate to think that there was anybody around with
bluer eyes than yours. I'm sure there isn't. Not around here
anyway.

But you don't know, do you? You haven't seen everybody, have you?

No. I haven't.

So there could be, couldn't there?

Not hardly.

But maybe. Maybe. You said "around here." Nobody "around here"
probably has bluer eyes. What about someplace else? Even if my
eyes are bluer than Joanna's and bluer than Michelena's and bluer
than that Lady's you saw, suppose there is somebody way off somewhere
with bluer eyes than mine?

Don't be silly.

There could be. Couldn't there?

Not hardly.

But suppose. Suppose a long way off. In Cincinnati, say, there
is somebody whose eyes are bluer than mine? Suppose there are two
people with bluer eyes?

So what? You asked for blue eyes. You got blue eyes.

He should have made them bluer.

Who.

Mr. Soaphead.

Did you say what color blue you wanted them?

No. I forgot.

Oh. Well.

Look. Look over there. At that girl. Look at her eyes. Are they bluer than mine?

No. I don't think so.

Did you look real good?

Yes.

Here comes someone. Look at his. See if they're bluer.

You're being silly. I'm not going to look at everybody's eyes.

You have to.

No I don't.

Please. If there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is somebody with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the whole world.

That's just too bad, isn't it?

Please help me look.

No.

But suppose my eyes aren't blue enough?

Blue enough for what?

Blue enough for...I don't know. Blue enough for something. Blue enough for you!

I'm not going to play with you any more.

Oh. Don't leave me.

Yes. I am.

Why? Are you mad at me?

Yes.

Because my eyes aren't blue enough? Because I don't have the bluest eyes?

No. Because you're acting silly.

Don't go. Don't leave me.

I have to. for a little while.

Will you come back if I get them?

Get what?

The bluest eyes. Will you come back then?

Of course I will. I'm just going away for a little while.

You promise?

Sure. I'll be back. Right before your very eyes.

~~THE END~~

Mr. Henry

2561

Spring

The first twigs are thin, green and supple. They bend into a complete circle, but ~~it~~ not break. Their delicate, showy hopefulness shooting from forsythia and lilac bushes meant only a change in whipping style. They beat us differently in the spring. Instead of the dull pain of a winter strap, there were these new green switches that lost their sting long after the whipping was over. There was a nervous meanness in these long twigs that made us long for the steady stroke of a strap or the firm but honest slap of a hairbrush. Even now spring for me is shot through with the remembered ache of switchings and forsythia holds no cheer

Sunk in the grass of a empty lot on a Spring Saturday, I split the stems of milk weed and thought about ants and peach pits and death and where the wordl went when I closed my eyes. I must have lain long in the grass for the shadow that was in front of me when I left the house had disappeared when I went back. I entered, ^{the house, as} was bursting with an uneasy quiet. Then I heard my mother singing something about trains and Arkansas. She came in the back door with some folded yellow curtains which she piled on the kitchen table. I sat down on the floor to listen to the song's story and noticed how strange she was behaving. She still had her hat on and her shoes were dusty as though she had been ~~working~~ walking in deep dirt. She put on some water to boil and then swept the porch; then she hauled out the curtain stretcher, but instead of putting the damp curtains on it, she swept the porch again. All the time singing about trains and Arkansas (Insert verses) 42#

When she finished, I went to look for Frieda. I found her upstairs lying on our bed, crying the tired whimpering cry that follows the first wailing--mostly gasps and shudderings. I sat down on the bed and looked at the tiny bunches of wild roses sprinkled over her dress. Many washings had faded their color and dimmed their outlines.

"What happened Frieda?"

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She lifted a swollen face from the crook of her arm. Shuddering still, she sat up letting her thin legs dangle over the bedside. I knelt on the bed and picked up the hem of my dress to wipe her running nose. She never liked wiping noses on clothes but this time she let me. It was the way Mama did with her apron.

"Did you get a whipping?"

She shook her head no.

"Then why you crying?"

"Because?"

"Because what?"

Mr. Shelby.

What'd he do?

Daddy beat him up.

What for? The Maginot Line? Did he find out about the Maginot Line?

no.

Well what then? Come on, Frieda. How come I caint know?

He...he picked at me.

Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead Church?

Sort of.

He shoed his privates at you?

Noooo. He touched me.

Where?

Here and here She pointed to the tiny breasts that, like two fallen acorns, scattered a few faded roses leaves on her dress.

Really? How did it feel?

Oh. Claudia. She sounded put out. I wasn't asking the right questions.

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It didn't feel like anything.

But isn't it supposed to? Feel good I mean? Frieda sucked her teeth. What'd he do?
Just walk up and pinch t hem?

She sighed. First he said how pretty I was. Then he grabbed my arm and touched me.

Where was Mama and Daddy?

Over ath the garden weeding.

What'd you say when he did it?

Nothing. I just ran out the kitchen and went to the garden.

Mama siad we wa s never to cross the tracks by ourselves.

Well what would you do? Set there and let him pinch you?

I looked at my chest. I dont have nothing to pinch. I'm never going to have nothing.

O Cladia youre jealous of everything. You want him to?

No I just get tired of having everything last.

You do not. What about Scarlæt fever? You had that first.

Yes but it doesn't last. Anyway, what happened at the garden?

I told mama and she told daddy and we all came home and he was gone, so we waited for him and ~~daddy~~ and when daddy saw him come up on the porch he threw our old tricycle at his head and knocked him off the porch.

Did he die?

Naw. He got up and started singing Nearer My God To Thee t hen mama hit him with a broom and told him to keep the Lord's name out of ~~ix~~ his mouth but he wouldn't stop and dady was cussing and everybody was screaming.

Oh shoot. I always miss ~~stiff~~.

And Mr. Buford came running out with his gun and mama told him to go somewhere and sit down and daddy said no give him the gun and Mr. Buford did and mama screamed and Mr. Shelby shut up and strated running and daddy shot at thim and Mr. Shelby jumped out of his shoes but kept on running in his socks. Then Rosemary came out and siad that daddy was going to jail and I hit her.

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Real hard?

Real hard.

Is that when mam whipped you?

She didn't whip me I told you.

Then why you crying?

Miss Dunion came in after everybody was quiet and mama and daddy was fussing about who let Mr. Shelby in anyway and she said that mama should take me to the doctor because I might be ruined. and mama started screaming all over agina.

At you?

No. At mrs. Dunion

But why were you crying?

I dont want to be ruined! The tears came back.

What's ruined?

You know. Like The Maginot Line. She's ruined Mama said so. ✓

An image of Frieda, big and fat came to mind. Her thin legs swollen, her face surrounded by layers of rouged skin. I too begin to feel tears.

But Frieda you could exercise and not eat.

She shrugged.

Besides what about China and Poland? They're ruined too arent they? and they aint fat.

That's because they drink whiskey. Mama says whiskey ate them up.

You could drink whiskey

Where would I get whiskey?

We thought about this. Noboby would sell it to us, we had no money anyway. There was never any in our house. Who would have some?

Pecola I said. Her fathers always drunk. She can get us some.

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You think so?

Sure. Cholly's always drunk. Lets go ask her. We dont have to tell her what for.

Now?

Sure, now.

What'll we tell mama.

Nothing. Lets just go out the back. One at a time. So she won't notice.

OK You g first Cladia.

We opened the fence gate at the bottom of the back yard and ran down the alley.

Pecola lived on the other side of Browday. We have neve r been in her house but we knew where it was. A two story grey building that had been a store downstairs and an apartment upstairs.

Nobobdy ans ere! our knock on the front door, so we walked around to the side door. As we ^{radio}approached we heard musich and looked to see wher it came from. Above us was th second atory porch lined with slanting, rotting rails and sitting on the porch was The Maginot Line herslef. We stared up and automatically reached for the other's hand. A mountain of flesh, she lay rather than sat in a rocking chair. She had no shoes on an each foot was poked between a railing ~~xxx~~: tiny baby toes at the tip of puffy feet; swollen ankles smoothes and tigh ened the skin; massive legs like tree stumps parted wide at the knees over which spread two roads of soft flabby inner thigh that kissed each other deep in the shade of her dress and closed. A dark brown root beer bottle, like a burnt limb grew out of her dimpled hand. She looked at us down through the porch railings and emitted a low long belch. Her eyes were as clean as rain and again I rememberd the waterfall. Neither of us could speak. Both of us imagined we were seeing what was to become of Frieda. The Maginot Line smile d at us.

You all looking f somebody?

I had to pull my tongue from th roof of my mouth to say Pecola. She live here?

Uh huh but she aint here now. She gone to hermama's work place to git the waps.

Yes mam. She coming back?

Uh huh. She got to hang up the clothes before the sun goes down.

Oh.

You can wait for her. Wanna come up here and wait?

We exchanged glances. I looked back up at the broad cinnamon roads that met in the shadow of her dress.

Freida siad No man.

Well , the Maginot line seemed interested in our problem "You can go to her mama work place but its way over by the lake.

Where by the lake?

That big white house with the wheelbarrow full of flowers.

It was a house we knew having admired the large white wheelbarrow tilted down on spoiled wheels and planted with seasonal flowers.

Aint that too far for you all to go walking?

Frieda scratched her knee. Why dont you wait for her? You can come on up here. Want some pop? Those rain soaked eyes lit up and her smile was full, not like the pinched and holding back smile of other grown ups.

I moved to go up the stairs, but Frieda siad No mam We aint 'llowed.

I was amazed at her courage and frightened of her sassiness. The smile of The Maginot Line slipped. Aint 'llowed?

No'm.

Aint 'llowed to what?

Go in your house.

Issat right? The waterfalls were still. How come?

My mama siad so. My mma siad you ruined.

The waterfalls began to run again. She put the root beer bottle to her lips and

drank it empty. With a graceful movement of the wrist, a gesture so quick and small we never really saw it, only remembered it afterwards, she tossed the bottle over the rail at us. It split at our feet and shards of brown glass dappled our legs before we could jump back. The Maginot Line put a fat hand on one of the folds of her stomach and laughed. At first just a deep humming with her mouth closed, then a larger warmer sound. Laughter at once beautiful and frightening. She let her head tilt ~~did~~ sideways, closed her eyes and shook her massive trunk letting the laughter fall like a wash of red leaves all around us. Scraps and curls of the laughter followed us as we ran. When our breath gave out at the same time our legs did. After we rested, our heads on crossed forearms against a tree I said Lets go home.

Frieda was still angry, fighting, she believed for her life. No We got to get it now We cant go all the way to the lake.

Yes we can. Come On.

Mama gone get us.

No she aint. Besides she cant do nothing but whip us.

That was true. She wouldnt kill us, or laugh a terrible laugh at us or throw a bottle at us.

We walked down tree lined streets of soft grey houses lining like tired ladies..... The streets changed; houses looked more sturdy, their paint was newer, porch posts straighter yards deeper. Then came brick houses set well back from the street fronted by yards edged in shrubbery clipped into smooth cones and balls of velvet green.

The lake front houses were the loveliest. Garden furniture, ornaments, windows like shiny eye glasses and no sign of life. The back yards of these houses fell away in green slopes down to a strip of sand and then the blue Lake Erie lapping all the way to Canada, The orange patched sky of the steel mill section never reached it is part of town. This sky was always blue.

We reached Lake Shore Park, a city park laid out with rosebeds, fountains, bowling

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greens, picnic tables. It was empty now but sweetly expectant of clean white well behaved children and parents who would play there above the lake in summer before half running half stumbling down the slope to the welcoming water. Back people were not allowed in the park and so it filled our dreams.

Right before the entrance to the park was the large white house with the wheel barrow full of flowers. Short crocus blades sheathed the purple and white hearts that so wished to be first they endured the chill and rain of early springs. The walkway was flagged in calculated disorder that hid the cunning symmetry. Only fear of discovery and the knowledge that we did not belong, kept us from loitering. We cried the proud house and went to the back.

There on the tiny railed stoop sat Pecola in a light red sweater and blue cotton dress. A little wagon was parked near her. She seemed delighted to see us.

Hi

Hi

What you all doing here? She was smiling and since it was a rare thing to see on her, I was surprised at the pleasure it gave me.

We're looking for you.

Who told you I was here?

The Maginot Line, She live up over you?

to him that?

Yes. that Big fat lady -

Oh yes mean Miss Marie. Her name is Miss Marie
Aint you scared? well everybody calls her the M. h.

Scared of What?

The Maginot Line

Pecola looked genuinely puzzled. What for?

Your mama let you go in her house? and eat out of her plates?

She dont know I go. Miss ^{Marie} Maginot Line is nice. They all nice.

Oh yeah, I said, she tried to kill us

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Who? Miss ^{Mamie} ~~Margaret~~ Line? She dont bother nobody.

Then how come your mama dont let you go in her house if she so nice?

I dont know. She say shes bad, but they aint bady. They give me stuff all the time.

What stuff?

Oh lots of stuff, Pretty dresses and shoes. I got more shoes than I ever wear. and jewelry and candy and money. They take me to the movies and onct we went to the carnival China gone take me to Cleveland and see th square and Polnd gone take me to Chicago to see the loop. We going everywhere togbber.

You lying. You dont have no pretty dresses.

I do too

Oh come on Pecola, What you telling us all that junk for? Frieda asked.

It aint junk. Pecola stood up ready to defend her words when the door opened.

Mrs. Breedlove stuck her head out the door and sied What's going on out here? Pecola, who these childring?

That's Frieda and Gladia, Mrs. Breedlove.

Whose girls are you? she she came all the way out on the stoop. She looked nicer than I had ver seen her in her white uniform and her hair in a small pompadour.

Mrs. Gren's girls, Mam.

Oh yas. Live over on twenty first street?

Yes mam.

What you doing way over hre?

Just walking. We came to see Pecola.

Well you bed get on back. You can walk with Pecola. Come on in while I get the wash.

We stepped into the kitchen, a large spacious room. Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowed like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelin, white woodwork, polished cabinets, and brilliant copperware. Odors of meat, vegetables and something freshly baked mixed with a scent of Fels Naptha.

I'm gone get the wash. You all stand stock still right there and dont mess up nothing. She disappeared behind a white swinging door and we could hear the uneven flap of her footsteps as she descended into the basement.

Another door opened and in walked a little girl , smaller and younger than all of us. She wore a pink sunback dress and pink ~~xxxx~~ fluffly bedroom slippers with two bunny ears pointed up from the tips. Her hair was corn yellow and bound in a thick ribbon. When she saw us fear danced across her face for a second. She looked anxiously around the kitchen.

Where's Polly? She asked.

The familiar violence rose in me. Her calling Mrs. Breedlove Polly when even Pecola called her mother Mrs. B seemed reason enough scratch her.

She's downstairs I said.

Polly! she called.

Coming baby.

Look. Frieda whispered, Look at that. On the counter near the stove ~~xx~~ in a silvery pan was a deep dish berry cobbler. The purple juice bursting here and there through the crust. We moved closer.

Its still hot too, Frieda said.

Pecola stretched her hand to touch the pan, lightly to see if it was hot.

Polly. Come here The little girl called again.

It may have been nervousness, awkwardness but the pan tilted under Pecola's fingers and fell to the floor spattering blackish blue berries everywhere. Most of the juice splashed on Pecola's legs and the burn must have been painful for she cried out and began hopping about just as Mrs. Breedlove entered with a tightly packed laundry bag. In one gallop she was on Pecola and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm slapped her again and in a voice thin with anger abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me

//

by implication. "Crazy fool...my floor, mess...look what you... work...get on out... now aht...crazy...my floor, my floor...my floor" Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries and we backed away in dread.

The little girl in pink started to cry. Mrs. Breedlove turned to her, "Hush baby hush. Come here. Oh Lord, look at your dress. Don't dory no more Polly will change it" She went to the sink and turned the tap water on a fresh towel. Over her shoulder she flung spit out words to us like rottem pieces of apple "Pick up that wash and get on out of here so I can get this mess cleaned up

Pecola picked up the laundry bag heavy with wet clothes and we stepped hurriedly out the door. As Pecola put the laundry bag in the wagon we could hear Mrs. Breedlove hushing and soothing the tears of the little pink and yellow girl

Who wer e they Polly?

Dont worry none baby

You gonna make another pie?

Course I will

Who weree they Polly?

Hush. Dont worry none. Dont worry none, she whispered and the honey ⁱⁿ of her words complemented the sundown spilling on the lake.