



## The Bluest Eye Draft

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## 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 lowing 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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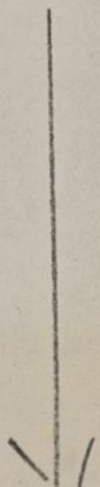
Earlier than that, there was a real estate office there, and even before that, some gypsies used it as a base of operations. The gypsy family gave the large plate glass windows as much distinction and character as it ever had. The girls of the family



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 store front 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





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meaness 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<sup>g</sup> bordering on idiocy<sup>g</sup>, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people, the rest of the family<sup>A</sup> 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 cheek<sup>ck</sup> bones 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<sup>g</sup> --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 separated 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 dustladen, 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" closet 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 beholder.

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 the peeled paint places because that's where <sup>at</sup> the baby, when he learned to pull up,



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 peices. The only living thing in the house was the coal stove, which lived independently of everything and everyone, /It's fire being "out", "banked", or "up" at its own discretion. The family fed it. Two or three coal shovelsfull. 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 noiseless<sup>ly</sup> out of bed, put a sweater on o<sup>ver</sup> her nightgown which was an old "day dress" and walked toward the kitchen. Her hard, bon<sup>ey</sup> feet made hard bon<sup>ey</sup> sounds . In the kitchen, with cupboard doors, the stove door, faucets, and pans, she made noises. The noises were hollow, but the threates they implied were not. Eunice opened here eyes. She lay staring at the the dead stove, cold and so unfriendly. 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 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



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 read and menacing. With the exception of Grey Eye, who had killed thirteen men and had spent only fourteen days in jail, 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 whiskeybutt 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 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. But



dened with a no-count man, whom God wanted her to punish (he was beyond redemption, of course, since redemption was hardly the point). ~~Quite~~ 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 <sup>more</sup> splendid she and her task became. In the sight of God.

No less did Cholly need <sup>of</sup> 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 ~~d~~isires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact. When a very young boy, 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~~ <sup>shone</sup> 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 policeman; he hated, despised the girl. Even half remembrance of this episode, along with a myriad ~~of~~ other humiliations, defeats, could stir him into flights of depravity that surprised him, but only him. 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<sup>le</sup> 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, poker, 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 un<sup>is</sup>surprised 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. He<sup>is</sup> 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, 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 bedframe. She had not let go of



pan 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 naked bastard! You naked bastard!" over and over and over. Mrs. Winder, having snatched up the round, flat stove lid, ran tiptoe 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.

Sammy said, "Kill him. Kill him."

"Cut out that noise, boy!" Mrs. Winder looked at Sammy with surprise. She put the stove lid 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<sup>PJ</sup>. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally, finally it, too, went. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, Almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left.

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 <sup>S</sup>Ammy 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 ~~had~~ <sup>have</sup> 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. Not because they were her family--she had no sense of family--but because the ugliness they had in common was binding. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, The ugliness that made her ignored or ~~dis~~<sup>e</sup>spised 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 <sup>t</sup> Maria Zapolski? 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 knew also 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!"



never fail to get pleas 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 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. 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.



## Part Three

3  
This was at least the fifth time today that Claudia had rearranged the things in her locker. Books, boots, sweater, scarf, ruler--all had to fit into a space that would not hold a frying pan. Things kept falling out or the door wouldn't close. <sup>↑</sup>  
(The sound of Bay Boy and Danny Rice jeering at somebody outside wasn't helping any.

"Hey, ] there. Black e mo! Ya daddy sleeps nekked! Black e mo! Black e mo!"  
Claudia stepped away from the wall of lockers to the window to see whom they were teasing. [She could see] down on the playground a girl walking swiftly--head bent, legs straight and moving like scissor blades. That must be that ugly black girl in her gym class. Real dumb or real stuck up.

"Ya ]daddy sleeps nekked, Black e mo! " The voices were full of joy.  
"Black e mo Black e mo yadaddysleepsnekked. Black e mo Black e mo yadaddysleepsnekked. Black e mo...."

The ]rhythm of the chant was infectious. Woodrow Cain joined in. Buddy Fuller, too. They made a chorus of four. Buddy began to tap. He tried to do the time step, but the rhythm wouldn't fit.

Bláck e mo Bláck e mo  
Ya dáddy sle-éps nékked

Buddy extemporized. Now he had it.

stch ta ta stch ta ta  
stch ta ta ta ta ta ta

*Other*  
~~Here~~ students gathered around. Tony Zanno started to whistle. Buddy really had it now. Frankie Yepko improvised on the harmonica. Everybody was singing

Black e mo Black e mo (stch ta ta stch ta ta)  
Ya daddy sle-eps nekked (stch ta ta ta ta ta ta)



Claudia took her boots and pushed them into a small space behind the last locker and the radiator. "They'll probably melt," she thought.

She walked down the steps passing the <sup>Activities</sup> room where a few other sixth graders were rehearsing for a Halloween play. She had been asked to try out for it, but the part they wanted her to play was one of the goblins. She wanted to be the pretty little girl who had gotten lost in the big woods and if she couldn't be that, she wouldn't be in it at all. Besides, they probably just asked her to try out because she was <sup>still</sup> a new girl.

Outside the school it was warm. A funny kind of day for October. Flu weather, her mother would call it. The first days of spring were flu weather; the first days of fall were flu weather; the first days of winter were flu weather; all queer days were flu weather. Any other days, days that were not first or queer, brought t.b. or sunstroke. Only May rain was safe. "Go on. Go on out and play in the rain. May rain is good for you."

Just ahead, Claudia saw the girl who had been teased by Bay Boy and Danhy Rice. Standing by a telephone pole, her back to the street, the girl was holding her face in her hands.

Claudia stopped. The song was still ringing in her ears and itching in her feet. "What's wrong with sleeping naked?" she wondered. She wanted to ask the girl if it was really true? Did her daddy sleep naked? Better not ask. Maybe sleeping naked was bad, and she was supposed to know it. She had seen her own daddy naked. He was walking down the hall from the bathroom into his bedroom, and passed the open door of her bedroom. She had lain there wide-eyed. He stopped and looked in, trying to see in the dark room whether she was really asleep or was it his imagination that she was looking at him. Apparently he convinced himself that she slept. He moved and the dark took him away.

He knew his little girl would not



lie open-eyed like that, staring, staring.

She had not closed her eyes. But, and this was the queer part, she had not felt ashamed at looking. She liked looking. Was that the bad part? When he had moved on, the dark took him away, but not his nakedness. It stayed there in her room, friendly-like.

Claudia stood near the crying girl. She said nothing. The girl looked up at her with surprised then <sup>right</sup> frightened eyes.

"Hey,] you know what?" Claudia said, "Bay Boy's head is shaped just like a bullet."

The] girl looked down at her shoes.

"Miss Forrester said he was incorrigaval," Claudia went on, "and that this was the third time he had failed the fifth grade."

The] girl did not answer, but neither did she walk away.

"I] just moved here. My name is Claudia Small."

"My] name is Eunice Winder."

"You're in my gym class. Dont you just hate it? I do."

"Yeah." ~~xxxxxx/xx/xx/xx/xx/~~ The word in Eunice's throat was hardly a sigh.

"Miss Erkmeister's legs sure are bow. I bet she thinks they're cute." How come she gets to wear real shorts and we have to wear those old bloomers? God! I just die every time I put them on."

Eunice wouldn't look at Claudia, but she seemed to be smiling.

"Come on," Claudia said. "You live this way?"

"Uh] huh. On Broadway and ~~thirty~~-first."

"Oh, yeah? I'm right near you. We live on twenty-eighth street. I used to live in Akron before I came here. I hated it. The boys there are so dumb."

She] sure don't talk much, thought Claudia. But that was all right. She preferred others to listen.

"Hey!" Claudia stopped, ~~in her tracks~~. "They're opening up a new Isaley's and



giving away free ice cream cones. Let's go by and get some. O.K.?"

"~~How~~? Are they?"

"Uh] huh. One to a customer, though."

The] girls walked faster, Claudia stopping every now and then to pull up her socks which were constantly being "walked" down into the back of her shoe and under the heel of her foot.

"My] uncle sued Isaley's," Claudia said. "He sued the Isaley's in Akron. They said he was disorderly and that was why they wouldn't serve him. But a friend of his, a policeman, came in and <sup>was</sup> beared witness. So the suit went through."

"What's a suit?"

"Oh,] it means you can beat them up, if you want to, and won't nobody do nothing to you."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Our family does it all the time. We believe in suits."

In] front of Isaley's Dairy there was a long line of chattering school children.

A few adults. ~~Eunice said she wanted chocolate~~ <sup>The girls</sup> stood in line discussing what flavor they wanted. Eunice said she wanted chocolate.

"Oh,] I hate chocolate," said Claudia. "Get orangepineapple."

"I] like chocolate."

"Not] me. I'm going to get black raspberry. Oh, look, they have French vanilla, too. Maybe I'll] get one dip of French vanilla and one dip of black raspberry."

When] it was their turn, Eunice asked for orange pineapple, and Claudia got one dip of pistachio and one of strawberry.

"God. What'd I get strawberry for? I hate those red lumps!"

They left the store, licking their cones and fighting through the lines to the  
Claudia wasn't afraid.

"Aw shut up. Go stick your head in a toilet. Shut up. Get outta my way, <sup>stupid</sup>



Eunice admired her.

"Watch!," shrieked Claudia, "it's dripping on that side."

Eunice caught the soft orange blob with a slow turn of her tongue.

She has a pretty mouth, thought Claudia. I wonder why she's so ugly. She herself was cute. All the boys said so. Some girls didn't like her because she was cute. But she couldn't help it.

"Don't eat the tip of the cone," she advised Eunice.

"Why?"

"Because there's a fly in there."

"How you know?"

"Oh, not really. A girl told me she found one in the bottom of hers once and every since then she throws that part away."

"Oh."

"Do you know Manuel? Do you think he's cute?"

"His nose is too flat," Eunice said.

Claudia bent double in shrieks of laughter. Eunice laughed too. A little at first and then more. And then more.

"That's Caroline's boyfriend," Eunice said when she caught her breath.

"The one with the raggedy teeth?"

"Uh huh."

They laughed again.

A woman walked past them with her stockings rolled down to her ankles. The girls went stiff, their eyes bulging, trying to exercise restraint and hold in the laughter. As soon as they got a little distance away, the giggles broke out with such force it was a long time before sheer weakness could stop them.

Betty Grable smiled down at them from the display window of the Dreamland Theatre

"Ohhhh. Ain't she sharp as a tack."

"Not as sharp as Hedy Lamarr."

"Oh nobody is as sharp as ~~that~~ she is."



Claudia agreed readily. "My mother said Audrey--you know Audrey? Audrey Maxwell?--well, she went to the beauty parlor and asked the lady 'Can you fix my hair like Hedy Lamarr's?' And the lady said 'Yeah. When you grow some hair like Hedy Lamarr's.'

More laughter. Long and sweet.

"Audrey's crazy," said Eunice.

"She sure is! Do you know she doesn't even menstrate yet and she's sixteen! Do you menstrate yet?"

"No."

"I do," said Claudia. She made no attempt to disguise her pride. "Two months ago I started. Dolores said when she started she was scared to death. Thought she had killed herself."

"What's it for?" asked Eunice.

"For babies."

"What you mean?"

"You know. Babies need blood when they are inside you. And if you're having a baby then you don't menstrate. But when you're not having a baby then you don't have to save the blood so it comes out."

"How do babies get the blood?"

"Through the like-line. You know. Where your belly-button is. That's where the like-line grows and pumps the blood to the baby."

"Well, if belly-buttons are to grow like-lines to give the baby blood, and only girls have babies, how come boys have belly-buttons?"

"I don't know." Claudia thought. "But you know boys have all sorts of things they don't need." Claudia's loud laughter hid Eunice's nervous one.

Claudia boldened. "Did you ever see a naked man?"

Eunice blinked. She looked away. "No. Where would I see a naked man?"

"I don't know."

"I wouldn't even look at him even if I did see him. That's dirty." *Cholly loomed, and* "Who wants



see a naked man? Nobody's father would be naked in front of his own daughter. Not unless he was dirty."

Claudia felt her face get warm. "You have too seen a naked man. Bay Boy said so!"

"I did not!"

"You did!"

"I didn't!"

"Did!"

"Didn't! "

"Did! Your own daddy, too!! "

Uncle backed away. She turned and <sup>walked swiftly across</sup> the street. Head down, legs moving like scissor blades, cutting.

"Black e mo!" Claudia shouted at the moving figure. "Black e mo!"

Spinning around too quickly, Claudia bumped into a drunken man.

"Move!" she screamed.

Lying on her bed, Claudia felt hot but there wasn't any sweat. She got up and went to the mirror over the dresser. She looked into the mirror.

"Anyway," she said aloud, "I'm cute."

*E. Love?*



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. <sup>drives</sup> would have been proud of that. Application of the principles of logic to everyday <sup>drives</sup> 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 winter<sup>s</sup> 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 so different from any other ethnic group. Economic and <sup>c</sup>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 <sup>settlement</sup> ~~steelment~~ home work in the blighted neighborhood of the impacted urban area of Buffalo, she could



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~~ 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 <sup>than</sup> the college days of training in settlement homes and the Buffalo Family Center. Here she was in Family Service, consultant ~~at the school~~ 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 woolley head and say, "Yas'm I'll gat huh dere ~~at the school~~. 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)...finds school unrelated to needs (translation: can't read but has a boyfriend)...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,



house, 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~~s~~ 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 ~~to~~ the ~~xxx~~ 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 than blank.

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

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



"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'."

*Yes. Well what about*  
"And 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 ever~~thing~~ing will be nice when she gets home."

"Go]on."

" 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 lemon merangue pie and cocoa. And then we turn on the radio and listen to the music, ~~on~~ WTAM, 620 on the dial..." Eunice~~wa~~s 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 appal<sup>ed</sup>ed 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-face<sup>d</sup>, little nigger-girl was ~~con~~ 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, this she knew, of all Negroes was their inability to face reality. <sup>was</sup> their preference, come what may, for some backward fairytale 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 ~~felt~~ 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 anymore. She held the girl's arms tighter. I want to help her, <sup>was surprised at the</sup> she thought, Maybe this one, <sup>just this once I can do something.</sup> this once, ~~I can help~~. 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. May be 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 ~~of~~ the nonsense, all ~~of~~ 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 clam 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 everyday. You don't take bubble baths. You probably don't even have a bathtub."

Eunice's eyes looked haunted.

"Listen." 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 made-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~~ <sup>It is</sup> ~~Those~~ <sup>It is</sup> ~~are~~ over there? They are artificial. They are 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



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



There is much silence. Then  
the Words pass.

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

Girl: Where do all the colours go?  
at night.

Moon: They die. They die.

Trees: I know you. You are bad.

Houses: Yes. Bad. See her crooked  
eyes.

Ward: Be still. Your heart makes  
too much noise.

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

Moon: Why?

Girl: I want to hear my footstep



away by the black.

Gail: Why are you staring at me?

Jess: Who knows that better than  
you?

Moan: Leave her alone. Poor  
girl. Her eyes are crooked.  
Balds but crooked.

Hauser. Yes, balds but crooked.

Jess. Yes balds, but very very  
crooked.

Hauser. Yes crooked, but very  
very bald

All: Haughter.

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



PART SIX

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 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 judgement 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 North Atlantic between North and South America, enclosing the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico: divided into the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles, and the Bahama Islands. No 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, labourious, 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. 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 authority 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 n-ed 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. Can anyone feel for a hotel room? One doesn't anymore 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 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 gnetle 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 fingershasted 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 RECOTR!

Now, Read This Carefully, Lord. I loved the tits, love them still, but they--the love of them--the touch <sup>taste</sup> and feel of them--were not just an easy luxurious human vice; they were, for me, A Thing To Do Instaad. Instead of Papa, instead of the Cloth, instead of Velma, and I chose not to do without them. Did You know that? Papa didn't. Papa 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.



Soaphead six

But consider: the woman who left the hotel room.

Consider: the greentime, the noon<sup>th</sup>ime 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 this morning. Tell me, Lord, how could you leave a lass so long so lone she could find her way to me? How could you? I weep ~~for~~ 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 said she had asked You for a long time, and you hadn't replied. (A habit, I could have told her, a long ago ~~has~~ 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 <sup>you</sup> a 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 firendliest 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. I mean no offense. I understand. I have been a



Soaphead seven

bad man too and an unhappy man too. But someday I will die. I was always so kind. 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. 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 any nastiness and there wasn't any filth and there wasn't any odour 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 and I loved her. I played You. And it was a very good show!

I said the Magic Words. Right straight through this thime. 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. <sup>T</sup>herefore 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 name. That is why it is hallowed. Nobody knows it.) Thy kingdom come (going to come? Here? <sup>T</sup>hey kingdom has already come?) Thy will be done (only thing<sup>e</sup>. Are there any other wills to be done? 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 tommorw. Can I trust you? Will you give me sustenance for a whole week together? Or must I ask you every day, everyday one day at a time. Is it good to thee that thou shouldst oppress? Or just lest we forget?



What is Man that thou art 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 for-  
give 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 poured me out as mild and curdled  
me like cheese? 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 fur of your  
own blue heave. 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 did good because now I can die God.



You see? I, too, have created. No 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 Whitcomb



PART SEVEN

~~EEYE~~

~~Eunice~~

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-

Go 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 scaredd 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?



EYE page two

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, bluey nice?

Oh God. You are crazy.

I am not!

I didn't mean it that way.

Well, what did you mean?

But 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 ~~way~~ 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 unahppy beofre. I guess you didn't wetic  
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 anthing 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 dont even go to school.

You don't wither.

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.



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EYE ~~page five.~~

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 <sup>of</sup> you ab<sup>o</sup>ut 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 any<sup>body</sup>. 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 <sup>gr</sup> 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 walk<sup>e</sup>s right over you.



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EYE ~~lage~~ six

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 <sup>he</sup> ~~se~~ 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 <sup>him</sup> ~~she~~ she sure let him do it to her a lot.

That's nothing.

How do you know?

I saw them all ~~of~~ 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~~ <sup>Sammy</sup> 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?



55  
EYE page eight

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 thought you 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.

Ango'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 anymore.



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.



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EYE ~~page ten~~

You don't sound sure.

Well Im 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 ~~ees~~. You got blue eyes.

He ~~sould~~ have made them bluer.

Who.

Mr. Soaphead.

Did you say what color blue you wanted them?



58  
EYE page eleven

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

~~Because I don't have~~

No. Because you're acting silly.

Don't go. Don't leave me.



EYE page twelve

Well. I'll be back.

Will you come back if I get them?

Get what?

The bluest eyes. <sup>Will</sup> ~~Will~~ you come back then ?

Of course I will. I'm ~~not~~ just going away for a little while.

You promise?

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

The End