



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.

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 to

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

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, 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 untempered 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.

went soft as the memory of just such a meal sometime somewhere transfixed her. All her stories were subject to breaking down at descriptions of food. Eunice saw Chain's teeth settling down into the back of crisp sea bass; saw the fat fingers putting back into her mouth; tiny flakes of white hot meat that had escaped from her lips; she heard the "pop" of the beer bottle cap; smelled the acridness of the first stream of vapor; felt the cold beeriness hit the tongue. She ended the daydream long before Chain.

"But what about the money?" she asked.

Fan hooted. "She's makin' like she's the Lady in Red that told on Dillinger. Dillinger wouldn't have come near you lessen he was going huntin' in Africa and shoot you for a hippo."

"Well, this hippo had a ball back in Chicago! Whoa Jesus, 99!"

"How come you always say Whoa Jesus and a number?" Eunice had long wanted to know.

"Cause my Momma taught me never to cuss."

"Did she teach you not to drop your drawers?" Fan asked.

"Didn't have none," said Chain. "Never saw a pair of drawers til' I was fifteen when I left Meridian and was doing day work in Cincinnati. My white ^{lady} woman gave me some old ones of hers. I thought they was some kind of stocking cap. I put ~~them~~ ^{it} on my head when I dusted. When she saw me she liked to fell out."

"You must have been one dumb somebody." Fan lit a cigarette and coiled her irons.

"How'd I know?" Chain paused. "And what's the use of putting on something you have to keep taking off all the time? Dewey never let me keep them on long enough to get used to them."

"Dewey who?" This was a new somebody to Eunice.

"Dewey who? Chicken! You never heard me tell of Dewey?" Chain was shocked by her own negligence.

"No, ma'am."

17
"Oh,] Honey, you've missed half your life. Whoa Jesus one nine five
You tal^king' 'bout smooth! I met him when I was fourteen. We ran away
and lived together like married for three years. You know all those
klinker-tops you see running' up here? Fifty of 'em in a bowl wouldn't
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 Auntie whipped me
good that first time when I told her I didn't get no money. I said 'Money?
For what? He didn't owe me nothin'' She said, 'The hell he didn't!'"

↓

They all dissolved in laughter.

Three merry gargoyles. Three merry harridans. Amused by a long ago
time of ignorance. They did not belong to those generations of prostitutes
created in novels, with great and generous hearts, d^edicated, because of the
horror of circumstance, to ameliorating the luckless barren life of men, taking
money incidentally and humbly for their "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. Neither were they the sloppy, inadequate
whores, who, unable to make a living at it alone, turn to drug consumption and
traffic or pimps to help complete their scheme of self-destruction, avoiding
suicide only to punish the memory of some absent father or to sustain the
misery of some silent mother. 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 scorn grown mechanical from use. Black men, white men, Puerto Rican, Mexicans, Jews, Poles, whatever--all were inadequate and weak--all came under their jaundiced eyes and were the recipients of their disinterested wrath. They took delight in cheating them. On one occasion the town well knew, they lured a Jew up the stairs, pounced on him, all three, held him up by the heels, shook everything out of his pockets and threw him out of the window.

Neither did they have respect for women, who, although not their colleagues, so to speak, nevertheless deceived their husbands, regularly or irregularly, it made no difference. "Sugar-coated whores," they called them, and did not yearn to be in their shoes. Their only respect was for what they would have described as "good, Christian, ^{Columbian} Negro women." The woman whose reputation was spotless, and who tended to her family, who didn't drink or smoke or run around. These women had their undying, if covert, affection. They would sleep with their husbands and take their money, but always with a vengeance. Nor were they protective and solicitous of youthful innocence. They looked back on their own youth as a period of ignorance and regretted they had not made more of it. They were not young girls in whores' clothing or whores regretting their loss of innocence. They were whores in whores' clothing, whores who had never been young and had no word for innocence. With Eunice they were as free as they were with each other. Chain concocted stories for her because she was a child, but the stories were breezy and rough. If Eunice had announced her intention to live the life they did, they would not have tried to dissuade her or voiced any alarm.

"You and Dewey have any children, Miss Chain?"

"Yeah. Yeah. We had some." Chain fidgeted. She pulled a bobby pin from her hair and began to pick her teeth. That meant she didn't want to talk anymore.

Eunice went to the window and looked down at the empty street. A 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 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, but each one left her with a pinched and harassed look. Then she applied make-up heavily. Now she gave herself surprised eyebrows and a cupid bow mouth. Later she would make oriental eyebrows and an evilly slashed mouth.

Hooks, in her sweet strawberry voice began another song:

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 burning brass
 His smile is sorghum syrup dripping 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 looked and looked at the women. Chain belched, softly, purringly, lovingly.

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. 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 nekked

Buddy extemporized. Now he had it.

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

Other 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 ^{Activities} 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 ^{still} 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 ^{rig} 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 incorrigival," 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." ~~Zzzzzz/z/z/z/z/z~~ 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?"

"Uh⁷huh. 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.?"

"~~Are they?~~ 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 as a 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. ~~They were all talking to each other~~ The girls 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 door. Claudia wasn't afraid.

"Aw shut up. Go stick your head in a toilet. Shut up. Get outta my way, ~~stupid~~"

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 Theater.

"Ohhhh. Isn'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. That 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. Whyre 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." Who was

Cholly Loomis

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 walked swiftly across 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."

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~~ ^{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~~ ^{settlement} 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 ~~one~~ 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 ~~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 ~~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)...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

"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'."

~~It was what it was~~
"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 lightening 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 everything 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 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

the middle of this freezing filth this ugly, pinched-face^d, 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, this she knew, of all Negroes was their inability to face reality. ^{was} their preference, come what may, ^{was} 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, she ^{was surprised at the} thought. Maybe this one, this once, ^{just this once I can do something.} ~~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. 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 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 drooping 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 make-believe world. Not to make excuses to yourself. Be honest with yourself. Really honest. Look around you. See? This is a piano. *That's not true* *It is* Those ~~are~~ *is* 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

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 Mariona 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 ~~and~~ 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 tip-toed toward the door, opened it quietly. She could not hazard a backward glance at that small bowed wolly head for fear she would cry again.

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 ^{my?} 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.

36
Part Five

A Play

Scene: A back yard

Characters

SNOW
MOON
STARS
WIND
GIRL
HOUSES
TREES

SNOW: silence

HOUSES: silence

WIND: sssssssssssssssssssssssss

TREES: silence

SNOW: silence

GIRL: silence

MOON: silence

GIRL: I love ... I love the snow. I love the snow. I love the snow.

SNOW: silence

WIND: sssssssssssssssssssssssss

GIRL: And the moon.

MOON: silence

GIRL: Add the stars.

STARS: silence

HOUSES: silence

MOON: silence

WIND: sssssssssssssssssssssssssssss

GIRL: I love the snow.

SNOW: silence.

THE END

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 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, 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?

40
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 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 loved little me.

41


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 fingershested 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^{taste} and feel of them--were not just an easy luxurious human vice; they were, for me, A Thing To Do Insteaad. 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.



4/3
Soaphead six

But] consider: the woman who left the hotel room.

Consider: the greentime, the noonthime 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 ndw 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 havit 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} 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 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. I mean no offense. I understand. I have been a

44
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 ^{S.W.} 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. ^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 name. That is why it is hallowed. Nobody knows it.) Thy kingdom come (going to come? Here? They kingdom has already come?) Thy will be done (only thing^e. 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 ^{over}tomorrow. 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 tempt^tation (into tempt^tation? 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 ^{sh}ould 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 ^uof your
 own blue heav^{en}. 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 di^e 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 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?

4/7
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 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.

52
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 ^{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 any^{body}. 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^W 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^{es} right over you.

EYE !age-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 ^{he} ~~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 ^{him} she sure let him do it to her a lot.

That's nothing.

How do you know?

I say 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~~ 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.

51
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 everybdy, 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 sombody 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~~^{eyes}. You got blue eyes.

He ^oould have made them bluer.

Who.

Mr. Soaphead.

Did you say what color blue you wanted them?

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.

59
EYE-page-twelve

Well. I'll be back.

Will you come back if I get them?

Get what?

The bluest eyes. ^{Will} 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.

H. E.