



M'Chere

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M'CHERE

by CHLOE MORRISON

Hannah sat out back under the pecan tree with the two pennies lodged in her cheeks. Hugging her knees, she examined the scars on them, remembering which marks were from which episode. The one shaped like a "c" was when she fell from the hood of an abandoned car into a piece of sea-green glass. The bold straight scar had been the one that had gone all the way to the bone. Miss Fayette, the school visiting nurse, had said: It will be all right; but you know you people keloid badly. It was a quietly grand feeling-- knowing that she and her people (only she thought) could kee-loid. Carefully breathing through her nose, she made her cheeks puff in and out around the bitter coins.

This was the last day she would have to suck the pennies because M'Chere would be put in the ground today and the evil spirits wouldn't get to her before her soul got to heave. Her house was sadness inside now, and everything was said in a real important way.

"More coffee, chere?" her aunt had asked her mother. Her mother had smiled in a different way. Slow, somehow.

"I like some, yes. It sweets me a little."

The little incidents and remarks of the day her mother was storing up like so many pieces of bright rags out of which she would make a patchwork quilt story to tell to the ladies when, with a lonely purring sound, they asked all about M'Chere's death.

"There wa'nt a fly in the house for some t'ree days;

t'ree days, mark you."

They sighed. Signs.

Hannah came in, at last, and went into the little front room where the coffin lay. A fat fly nestled in the inside corner of M'Chere's eyelid. Hannah brushed him away, but he stubbornly and lazily returned. The assafoetida bag was still hanging by a leather strip from the shrunken neck. M'Chere had always smelled bad in the spring because of it. Nobody called Grandmere by her real name. All of her children had called her M'Chere in the beginning and, now, for miles along the bayou, she was M'Chere to everybody.

Slowly, almost playfully, Hannah touched the dead woman's hair. She tugged gently at the jet black mass of curls that were neatly gathered on the brow. Without warning, the curls came away from the head in Hannah's hand exposing a smooth untroubled forehead, thrown into even more stark relief because of the other shock of hair that covered the back of the head. Hannah leaped back and away from the coffin, rubbing the trembling out of her hand on her dress. She bolted from the room out through the porch door and around to the back.

Under the pecan tree, Hannah's fear gave way to shame. It was true what Leonie had said. What she and Dew Boy had fought about. M'Chere did wear a wig. M'Chere had lied, and lied and lied.

With a grand whoosh of air, she spat the pennies, both at once, from her mouth. They fell without sound on the grass.

They came and took M'Chere away. Hannah did not go to the burial. She told her mother that she felt "funny" in her stomach. The dignity of mourning prevented her mother from insisting. When everyone was gone, she waited for a bit and then went into the back yard and picked up ~~the~~ two penies. Her eyes burned all the way to the Big Apple Commissary where she bought two big sheets of candy beads.

She would give Leonie one.

Chloe Morrison

Chloe W. Morrison

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