



## Patricia

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Morrison, Toni. 1931-

Patricia

1 folder (partial)

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Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:04:02 PM UTC

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**PATRICIA**

The bells and pine trees ~~were done~~. <sup>was</sup> Cut from green and red construction paper. Just the glitter left for the trim. Last year she had made a mistake letting the little ones do it. After cleaning their fingers and elbows of glue, picking the tiny specks of silver from their hair and faces, she had to do the decorations over anyway. This time she would hand out the bells and trees for the wrapping paper and monitor each dot of glue herself. Although the pot holders, pin cushions, the painted boxes and paper doilies were like all the Christmas presents she supervised, this was, for her, the best time of the year. The older ones rehearsed with Kate. The middle ones memorized their speeches. And the whole town helped or meddled: men repaired the platform, strung rope for sheets ~~and~~ curtains and Christmas lights. The women made cookies, punch, taffy and wrapped the peppermint sticks with big red bows. <sup>The</sup> Each church <sup>programs were more</sup> ~~had its own~~ <sup>elaborate</sup> program, but the school program involved everybody.

<sup>December</sup> The days were warm and windy; the sky behaving like a showgirl, its pale, melancholy <sup>spots</sup> ~~mrnings~~ giving way to long ribbons of primary colors in the evening. A mineral scent was in the air, sweeping down from some Genesis time when volcanoes broke open the earth; when lava cooled quickly under relentless wind. wind that



smoothed ~~cold~~ <sup>then</sup> ~~stone~~ <sup>scoured</sup> sculpted it and, finally, crumbled it to the bits  
rockhounds loved. The same wind that once parted clumps of ~~buffalo~~ <sup>bison</sup> hair and lifted that of the Cheyenne / Arapaho, telling both when the other was near. (over)

She had noticed the mineral smell all day and now, finished with grading papers and making decorations, <sup>she</sup> checked the showgirl sky for a repeat performance. But it was gone now. Nothing spectacular left, nothing outrageously beautiful. Just some lilac shapes running after a day-glo sun.

Her father had gone to bed early, exhausted from the monologue he had delivered <sup>e</sup> at the supper table <sup>about</sup> The gas station he was planning. Eagle Oil was encouraging him--no use to talk to the big oil companies. Deek and Steward were interested--<sup>in</sup> approving the loan, selling him the property. The only question was where. Across from Anna's store? Good spot, but Holy Redeemer might not think so. North, then? Next to Sargeant's Feed and Seed? There would be plenty of customers--nobody would have to travel ninety miles for gasoline, or keep tanks of it where they lived. The roads? Something might be done to the two dirt ones that extended south and north of Ruby's paved road to the county's route 18. With the franchise, the

lifted streams of Cheyenne / Arapaho  
hair; that parted the ~~clumps and~~  
rope <sup>hair</sup> that ~~grew from~~ <sup>covered the napes of</sup> bison like  
a <sup>beggar's</sup> shawl &



county might ~~do~~ <sup>tarmac</sup> them both. ~~tarmac~~ <sup>anyway</sup>. It would be a problem though, trying to get local people to agree to petition for it--the old ones would put up a fight. They liked being off the country road, accessible only to the lost and the knowledgeable. "But think of it, Patsy, just think of it. I could fix cars, engines; sell tires, batteries, fan belts. Soda pop too. Something Anna don't stock. No point in getting her riled up."

Patricia nodded. A very good idea, she thought, like <sup>all</sup> of his ideas. His veterinary practice (illegal, he had no license, but who knew or cared enough to drive a hundred miles to help Wisdom Poole yank on a foal stuck in its mother?); his butcher business (bring him the slaughtered steer--he'd skin, butcher, carve and refrigerate it for you); and of course the ambulance/ mortuary business. Because he wanted to be, studied to be, a doctor most of his enterprises had to do with operating on the sick or dead. The gas station idea was the first non-surgical proposal she could remember (though his eyes did fire when he spoke of taking apart engines). She wished he had been a doctor, had been accepted in a medical school. Chances are her mother would be alive today. Maybe not. Maybe he would have been away at <sup>Meharry Medical School</sup> ~~that school~~ instead of the mortuary one when Delia died.

As quickly as it <sup>came</sup> ~~had come~~, dazzling color disappeared on these short December days. The wind souged trying to dislodge ~~cold~~ sequins from the black crepe sky. Pat climbed the <sup>s</sup> ~~a~~ stairs to her bedroom and decided to while away the rest of the evening on her history project. Rather <sup>,</sup> what used to be a history project but was nothing of the sort now. It began as a gift to Ruby--a collection of family trees; the geneologies of each of the fifteen families. Upside down trees, the trunks sticking in the air, the branches <sup>sloping</sup> ~~arching~~ down. When the trees were completed she <sup>had begun</sup> ~~began~~ to supplement the brances <sup>h</sup> of who begat whom with notes: what work they did, for example, where they lived, to what church they belonged. Some of the nicer touches ("Was Missey Rivers, wife of Thomas Blackhorse, born near the Mississippi river? Her names seems to suggest...") she had gotten from her students' autobiographical compositions. ~~(Not anymore.~~

Some parents complained about their children being asked to gossip, to divulge <sup>what</sup> ~~would~~ could be private information, secrets, even. <sup>Then</sup> ~~Most~~ of her notes came from talking to people, asking to see bibles and church records. But she didn't want or need <sup>any more</sup> ~~further~~ research. The <sup>still</sup> trees <sup>g</sup> required occasional additions ~~now~~--births, marriages, deaths--but her interest in the supplementary notes grew as <sup>the notes</sup> ~~they~~ did and she



gave up all pretense to objective ~~historical~~ comment. (over)

Arnette and K.d., married last July, were expecting a child. Pat located the Morgan file and went to the limb that was, so far, one line:

Cato Smith (aka K.D. [as in Kentucky Derby] m. Arnette Fleetwood

There wasn't much space beneath, but they probably wouldn't need ~~it for any~~ <sup>much to list their</sup> descendents. Arnette's mother had only two children, one of whom had fathered only defectives. In addition these later Morgans were not as prolific as the earlier ones. Zecharah Morgan (aka Big Papa nee Coffee) m. Mindy Flood [note: Anna Flood's great aunt] ~~and~~ had nine children survive<sup>ing</sup>. Pat ran her finger over their names: Pryor Morgan, Rector Morgan, Shepherd Morgan, Ella Morgan, Loving Morgan, Selanie Morgan, Governor Morgan, Queen Morgan and Scout Morgan. One of her notes said: "It took seven births for them to get around to <sup>ing</sup> given a female child an administrative, authoritative sounding name, and I bet they called her 'Queenie.' " Another comment, threading out from Zechariah's name was <sup>look on</sup> "He ~~must have~~ <sup>gave himself</sup> taken, ~~invented~~, that name. Coffee was his birth name--a misspelling



It

It was reaching the point where the  $\frac{1}{2}$  m period  
was a joke, a dream; a violation  
of law that exhausted her; had her  
biting her thumb nail in disgust and fury.

Drum Blackhorse's <sup>father</sup>~~mother~~ was X

X was also his mother's father

Looney  
let her have  
the Bible  
period  
(for weeks)  
but it  
and was the  
20 minutes  
she spent  
looking at  
X - Bible  
that she  
learned  
a new kind  
species of tree  
would be  
needed  
to go further.

of Kofi, certainly. And since no Louisiana Morgans ~~owned him~~ or any  
Haven people, <sup>worked for any Morgans</sup> he must have chosen ~~it~~ <sup>his last name as well as his first</sup> from something or someplace  
he liked. Zacharias, father of John the Baptist? or the Zechariah who  
had such strange visions? <sup>saw</sup> Scrolls of curses; women in baskets, <sup>+</sup> <sup>The one who</sup> and  
who saw Joshua's filthy clothes changed into rich ones; ~~Zecharias~~  
who saw the ~~horrible~~ <sup>disobedience</sup> result of ~~disobeying~~ God. The punishment of not  
showing mercy or compassion was a scattering among all nations and  
land once pleasant made desolate. That would fit for Zechariah  
Morgan: the curse, ~~the~~ women in a basket, ~~lidded~~ <sup>on lid</sup> with lead and taken  
to a house, but especially the scattering. ~~it~~ would be the scattering  
that would have frightened him. The break up of the group or tribe or  
consortia <sup>um</sup> of families or, in Coffee's case, the splitting up of a  
contingent of families who had lived with or near each other since  
before Bunker Hill. <sup>He would have imagined the terror of</sup> Being thrown apart into foreign land <sup>and</sup> becoming  
alien to each other. <sup>of</sup> Not knowing a jawline that signified one family,  
a cast of eye or a walk that identified another. <sup>of</sup> Not being able to see  
yourself duplicated in a third or ~~fouth~~ <sup>4th</sup> generation grandchild. Not  
knowing where the generations before him were buried or how to  
get in touch with them if you didn't know. That would be the  
Zechariah Coffee would chose for himself. That would have appealed



to him if he heard some mighty preacher tell that story of Joshua crowned. <sup>He would not name himself after</sup> ~~Not~~ Joshua, the king, but <sup>after</sup> the witness to whom God and angels spoke on a regular basis about things Coffee knew something about."

When she asked Steward where his grandfather got his name, either of them, he'd grunted and said he thought it was Moyne <sup>Not Morgan but Moyne or</sup> originally, Le Moyne or something but "We called him Big Papa. Called my daddy Big Daddy" as though that ended it. Insulted-like. <sup>Because</sup> ~~Because~~ he himself wasn't a papa or a daddy, big or otherwise. <sup>So</sup> the Morgan line was slackening. <sup>One</sup> One of Coffee's (Zechariah's) sons, named Rector, had seven children with his wife, Beck, but only four survived: Elder, the twins (Deacon and Steward) <sup>Morgan</sup> and K.D.'s mother, Ruby. Elder died leaving his wife Susannah (Smith) with six children--all of whom <sup>had</sup> moved from Haven to northern states. Zechariah would <sup>have</sup> hate that. <sup>he</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>Mouthed his own curses,</sup> And sure enough from then on the fertility shrivelled even while the bounty multiplied. The more money, the fewer children; the fewer children, the more money to give the fewer children. Assuming you amassed enough of it which was why the richest ones--Deek and Steward--were so keen on the issue of K.D.'s marriage. Or so she supposed.

*Each and everyone*  
All of them, however, had the little mark she had chosen to put after their names. 8-R. *An abbreviation for* Signifying eight-rock. Those with blue black skin, tall and graceful, whose wide innocent eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren't 8-rock like them.

Descendents of those who had been in Louisiana when it was French, when it was Spanish, when it was French again, when it was sold as territory to Jefferson and when it became a state in 1812.

Descendents of those who had defied or hid from whites *doing* ~~who did~~ all they could to force them to stay and work as sharecroppers in

Louisiana; who spoke a patois part Spanish, part French, part English

and all their own. Descendents of those who had walked to the 'Run.'

Walked, like pilgrims to Mecca, from Louisiana to Oklahoma in 1890 and got to the place described on advertisements that were folded into their shoes or creased into the brims of their hats only to be shooed away.

*Pat was convinced that*  
When the next generation of 8-rock males *did scatter* scattered--in the army--it could have been over and done with, just as Zechariah

*was a burn whose scar tissue was numb*  
*wasn't*  
feared. Should have been over and done with. The Rejection of the Pilgrims *oh,* ~~having outlived its time by 1949, hadn't it?~~ No. Those that survived the war came right back home, saw what had become of

*a deep deep  
level of in the  
Coal mine*



Haven, heard about the testicles chopped off of other ex-colored soldiers; ~~heard~~ about medals being torn off by gangs of rednecks and Sons of the Confederacy--that would have been Rejection Part Two ~~started over~~ *It was like watching* for them. Like a parade banner that said WAR WEARY SOLDIERS! UNWELCOME HOME! So they did it again. *And* just as the original pilgrims *after being cold-shouldered at the first.* never sought another colored townsite, this generation joined no organization, fought no civil battle. They consolidated the 8-rock blood and, haughty as ever, moved further west. The New Fathers. Deacon Morgan, Steward Morgan, William Cato, Ace Flood, Aaron Poole, Senior Pulliam, Nathan DuPres, Moss DuPres, Arnold Fleetwood, Ossie Beauchamp, Harper Jury, Sargeant Person, John Seawright, Edwards Sands and her father, Roger Best who was the first to violate the blood rule. The one nobody admitted existed. The one established when the Louisiana Pilgrims noticed and remembered that the Rejection came from fair-skinned colored men. Blue-eyed, gray-eyed yellowmen in good suits. They ~~reportedly~~ *as the story goes,* were kind though. Gave them food and blankets; took up a collection for them, but were unmoving in their refusal to let them stay more than a night's rest. The story went that Zechariah Morgan and Drum Blackhorse forbade the women to eat the food. That August Cato left the blankets in the

tent with the three dollars and nine cents neatly stacked on top. But Soane said her grandmother, Celeste Blackhorse, sneaked back and got the food, secretly passing it to Bitty Cato, Praise Compton and her sister Sally Blackhorse to distribute to the children.

So the rule was set and lived a solid forever life because it was never spoken, except for the hint in words Zechariah forged for the Oven. More than a rule. A curse: "Beware the furrow of his Brow" in which the You (understood) nominative case was not a command to the believers, the Pilgrims looking for Paradise, but a threat to those who had stood in the way. It must have taken him months to think up those words--just so--to have multiple meanings; to appear stern, urging obedience to God, but ~~benevolent~~, ~~not~~ specifying what the Furrow might cause to happen. So the teen-agers Misner organized who wanted "We Are the Furrow of his Brow" were more insightful than they knew. Look what they did to Menus, forcing him to give back or return the woman he brought home to marry. The pretty sandy-haired girl from Virginia. Menus hadn't been sober since. And though they attributed his weekend drunks to his Vietnam war memories, and they laughed with him as he cut their hair, Pat knew love in its desperate state when she saw it. She believed she had

Pool's?  
Fleet  
woods?

neutral, not identifying the subject of the sentence.  
NOT

to change it to



Brood Poule (Sennin)

Went into a riverbank  
and prayed - alone) all the  
next night. In the morning  
the others joined him. - sang  
and prayed aloud.

? horse, black & wild looking  
appeared

seen it in her father's eyes, poorly veiled by his business ventures.

Now in the margin next to

Roger Best m. Delia

she wrote: "Daddy, they don't hate us because Mama was your first client. They hate us because she looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me and although I married Billy Cato who was an 8-rock like you, like them, I passed the skin onto my daughter. A lot of those Sands seem to marry the Seawrights, <sup>but</sup> and they are careful <sup>to make sure</sup> that their children marry into other families. So we were the first visible glitch, but there was an invisible one too. In Billy's family. Because his mother, Fawn, was born a Blackhorse and married his grandmother's uncle, August Cato. Or, to put it another way, Billy's mother married her <sup>own</sup> great uncle. Or another way: my husband's father, August Cato, is also his grandmother's (Bitty Cato Blackhorse's ) uncle and therefore Billy's great granduncle as well. (Bitty Cato's father, Sterl Cato, married a woman named Honesty Jones. It must have been she who insisted on naming her daughter Friendship, and was probably riled at hearing the child called Bitty for the rest of her life.) Since Bitty Cato married Peter Blackhorse, and



since her daughter, Fawn Blackhorse, married Bitty's uncle, and since Peter Blackhorse is Billy Cato's grandfather--well, you can see the problem with blood rules. It's distant, <sup>I know,</sup> and August Cato was an old man when he married little Fawn Blackhorse. And maybe that's why she had just the one child, my husband Billy. Still the Blackhorse blood is there and that makes my daughter, Billie Delia a fifth? cousin to Soane and Dovey because Peter Blackhorse was brother to Thomas Blackhorse and Sally Blackhorse, and Thomas Blackhorse was Soane's and Dovey's father. Now Sally Blackhorse married Aaron Poole and had eleven children, two of whom Billie Delia is in love with, and there is something, ~~most probably,~~ wrong with that but I can't figure out what."

Pat drew a line from her mother's name, tipped it with an arrow and wrote:

"The women really tried, Mama. They really did. Kate's mother, Catherine Jury, you remember her, and Fanny DuPres, the midwife who delivered me (she's dead now), and Dovey Morgan and Charity Flood. But none of them could drive. You must have believed that deep down they hated you, but not all of them, maybe none of them, because they begged the men to go get help. I heard them. Dovey

Morgan was crying as she left to find somebody, going from house to house: Harper Jury, Catherine's own husband; <sup>to</sup> Charity's husband, Ace Flood's, and Sargeant Person's (how come that ignorant Negro doesn't know his name is Pierson?) All of the excuses were valid, reasonable. Even with their wives begging they came up with excuses because they looked down on you Mama, I know it, and despised Daddy for marrying a wife with no last name, a wife without people, a wife of sunlight skin, a wife of racial tampering. The two midwives were in trouble <sup>(it was coming too soon, feet first and folded underneath)</sup> and all they wanted was to get one of the nuns at the Convent. One of them was a nurse. Catherine Jury went to Soane's to see if Deek was there. He wasn't, but Dovey was. <sup>It was Dovey who</sup> she went to Seawright's, then <sup>Fleetwood</sup> Sargeant's. Went to every house in walking distance. The DuPres's lived way way out. <sup>So did Steward, and the Poole's, the DuPres, and the rest</sup> Finally they got Senior Pulliam to agree. But by the time he got his shoes tied it was too late. Fanny DuPres hollered through his door--too frustrated to knock, too angry to step inside--and said 'You can take your shoes back off, Senior. Get your preacher clothes ready so you'll be in time for the funeral!' Then she was gone from there.

"When Daddy got back everybody was worried sick about how long the bodies could last before you both had to go in the ground,



Roger or no Roger, husband or no husband. But Daddy came back the second day. No time for a decent wake. So you were his first job.

And a wonderful job he did too. You were beautiful. With the baby <sup>in the</sup> ~~by~~  
<sup>crook of</sup> <sup>arm</sup> your ~~side~~. You would have been so proud of Daddy.

"He doesn't blame anybody except himself for being at mortuary graduation. We have quarrelled about it and he doesn't agree with me that those 8-rock men didn't want to <sup>go</sup> bring a white into town; or else didn't want to drive out to a white's house begging for help; or else they just despised your <sup>pale</sup> ~~white~~ skin so much they thought of reasons why they could not go. Daddy says more than one woman has died in childbirth and I say who? So the mother without one died and the baby whom you planned to name Faustine if a girl, or Richard after Daddy's oldest brother, if a boy, died too. Faustine. My baby sister. We would have grown up together. Patricia and Faustine. Too light, maybe, but together it would not have mattered to us. We'd be a team. I have no aunts or uncles, remember, because all of Daddy's sisters and brothers died of what they called walking pneumonia but what must have been the 1919 influenza epidemic. So I married Billy Cato when I finished that school in Texas, partly because he was beautiful, partly because he made me laugh, and partly (mostly?)

because he had the midnight skin of the Cato's and the Blackhorse's along with that Blackhorse feature of stick straight hair. Like Soane's and Dovey's hair, and like Easter and Scout had. But he died, did Billy, and I took my lightish but not white-ish baby and moved back in your pretty little house with the mortuary in back and have been contented teaching the children who call me Mrs. Best as everybody else does, so short was the time I was Pat Cato. "

The words had run to the back of the page, so she used a blank sheet to continue:

"That must have been some ride from Haven to here. You, Mama, among those skinny blue black giants, neither they nor their wives staring at your long brown hair, your honey speckled eyes, but the babies unable not to. Did Daddy tell you Don't worry your head; it was going to be all right? Did they ever need you, use you to go into a store to get supplies or a can of milk while they parked around the corner? If so, that was the only thing your skin was good for. Otherwise it bothered them. Reminded them of why Haven existed, of why a new town had to take its place. The one-drop law the whites made up was hard to live by if nobody could tell it was there. When you drove through a town, or when a sheriff's car was near, did Daddy



‘tell you to get down, to lie on the floor of the car because it would have been no use telling a stranger that you were colored? Did Soane or Dovey, new brides too, talk woman-talk with you? You were pregnant and so were they (that was Dovey’s first miscarriage). So did you talk together about how you all felt? Make tea for hemorrhoids, give one another salt to lick or copper dirt to eat in secret? I craved baking soda when I carried Billie Delia. Did you when you carried me? Did the older women with children advise you, like Aaron’s wife Sally with four children already? What about Alice Pulliam--her husband wasn’t a reverend yet but he had already heard the Call and decided to become one so they must have had some charitable, some Godly feelings then when they were young. Did they make you welcome right away or did they all wait for the Oven to be re-assembled and the following year re-baptize you in the river?

“What did Daddy say to you at that AME Zion picnic? The one held for colored soldiers stationed at the base in Tennessee. How could either of you tell what the other was saying? He talking Louisiana, you speaking Tennessee. The music so different, the sound coming from a different part of the body. It must have been like hearing lyrics set to scores by two different composers. But he must

have said I love you and you understood that and it was true too,  
because I have seen the desperation in his eyes ever since--no  
matter what business venture he thinks up."