



Beloved Draft 2

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BELOVED

Draft2

124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. Sethe knew it and so did her daughter, Denver. The two of them lived all alone there because the boys had gone and left by the time they were thirteen years old--as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Bugler); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more; another kettle-ful of chick peas smoking in a heap on the floor; soda crackers crumbled and strewn in a line next to the door sill. Nor did they wait for one of the relief periods: the weeks, months even, when nothing was disturbed. No. Each one fled at once--the moment the house committed what was for him the one insult not to be borne or witnessed a second time. Within two months, in the dead of winter, leaving their Grandmother, Baby Suggs; Sethe, their mother; and their little sister Denver all by themselves in the gray and white house on Bluestone Road. It didn't have a number then, because Cincinnati didn't stretch that far. In fact, Ohio had been calling itself a state only seventy years when first one brother and then the next stuffed quilt packing into his hat, snatched up his shoes and crept away from the lively spite the house felt for them.

Baby Suggs didn't even raise her head. From her sick bed she heard them go but it wasn't the reason she lay still. It

was a wonder to her that her grandsons took so long to realize that there were houses whose hatred of their inhabitants was not as conscientious as the one on Bluestone Road. Suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead, she couldn't get interested in leaving life or living it, let alone the fright of two creeping-off boys. Her past had been like the present--intolerable and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness, she used the little energy left her for pondering color.

"Bring a little lavender in, if you got any. Pink, if you don't."

And Sethe would oblige her with anything from fabric to her own tongue. Winter in Ohio was especially rough if you had an appetite for color. Sky provided the only drama and counting on a Cincinnati horizon for life's principle joy was reckless indeed. So Sethe and the girl Denver did what they could, and what the house permitted, for her.

Together they waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of their home; against turned-over slop jars, smacks on the behind, and gusts of sour air. For they understood the source of the outrage as well as they knew the source of light.

Baby Suggs died shortly after the brothers left with no interest whatsoever in their leave-taking or hers, and right afterwards Sethe and Denver decided to end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so. Perhaps a conversation, they thought, an exchange of views or something would help.

So they held hands and said, "Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on."

The sideboard took a step forward but nothing else did.

"Grandma Baby must be stopping it," said Denver. She was ten and very respectful of older people.

Sethe opened her eyes. "I doubt that," she said.

"Then why don't it come?"

"You forgetting how little it is," said her mother. "She wasn't even two years old when she died. Too little to understand. Too little to talk much even."

"Maybe she don't want to understand," said Denver.

"Maybe. But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her." Sethe released her daughter's hand and together they pushed the sideboard back against the wall. Outside a driver whipped his horse into the gallop local people felt necessary when they passed 124.

"For a baby she throws a powerful spell," said Denver.

"No more powerful than they way I loved her," Sethe answered and there it was again. The welcoming cool of unchisled headstones; the one she selected to lean against on tip toe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it was, and sprinkled with glittering chips. Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free.

Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten "Dearly" too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible--that

for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, really) engraved on her baby's headstone: Dearly Beloved. But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered. She thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer one more policeman, one more abolitionist speaker and a town full of disgust.

Counting on the stillness of her own soul, she had forgotten the other one: the soul of her baby girl. Who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage. Rutting among the stones under the eyes of the engraver's son was not enough. Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide ^{open} as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil.

"We could move," she suggested once to her mother-in-law.

"What'd be the point?" asked Baby Suggs. "Not a house in the country that ain't packed to its rafters with some dead nigger's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My first husband's spirit was to come back in here? or yours? Don't talk to me. You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful why don't you. I had eight. Everyone of them gone away from me.

Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil." Baby Suggs rubbed her eyebrows. "My first born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember."

"That's all you let yourself remember," Sethe had told her, but she was down to one herself now--one alive that is--the boys chased off by the dead one and her memory of Bugler was fading fast. Howard at least had a head shape nobody could forget. As for the rest, she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately her brain was devious. She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard. Nor was there the faintest scent of ink or the cherry gum and oak bark from which it was made. Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward water. And then sopping the chamomile away with pump water and rags, her mind fixed on getting every last bit of sap off--on her carelessness in taking a shortcut across the field just to save a half mile, and not noticing how high the weeds had grown until the itching was all the way to her knees. Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes and although there was not a leaf

on that farm ²th¹ did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in arrogant beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her--remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that.

When the last of the chamomile was gone, she went around to the front of the house collecting her shoes and stockings on the way. As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away, was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men. And although she could never mistake his face for another's, she said "Is that you?"

"What's left." He stood up and smiled. "How you been, girl, besides barefoot?"

When she laughed it came out loose and young. "Messed up my legs back yonder. Chamomile."

He made a face as though tasting a teaspoon of something bitter. "I don't want to even hear bout it". Always did hate that stuff."

Sethe balled up her stockings and jammed them into her pocket. "Come on in."

"Porch is fine, Sethe. Cool out here." He sat back down and looked at the meadow on the other side of the road, knowing

the eagerness he felt would be in his eyes.

"Eighteen years," she said softly, as though telling her self something new.

"Eighteen," he repeated. "And I swear I been walking every one of em. Mind if I join you?" He nodded toward her feet and began unlacing his shoes.

"You want to soak them? Let me get you a basin of water." She moved closer to him to enter the house.

"No. uh uh. Can't baby feet. A whole lot more tramping they got to do yet."

"You can't leave right away, Paul D. You got to stay awhile."

"Well, long enough to see Baby Suggs, anyway, Where is she?"

"Dead."

"Aw no.. When?"

"Seven years now. Almost eight."

"Was it hard? I hope she didn't die hard."

Sethe shook her head. "Soft as cream. Being alive was the hard part. Sorry you missed her though. Is that what you came by for?"

"That's some of what I came for. The rest is you. But if all the truth be known, I go anywhere these days. Anywhere they let me sit down."

"You looking good."

"Devil's confusion. He let's me look good long as I feel bad."

MTK [des. of Paul D]

He looked at her and the word "bad" took on another meaning.

Sethe smiled. That is the way they were--had been. All of the Sweet Home men, before and after Halle, treated her to a mild brotherly flirtation, so subtle you had to scratch for it.

"I wouldn't have to ask about him, would I? You'd tell me if there was anything to tell wouldn't you?" Sethe looked down at her feet.

"I'd tell you. Sure I'd tell you. I don't know anymore now than I did then."

MTK [pause to consider] "You must think he's still alive."

"No. I think he's dead. It's not being sure that keeps him alive."

"What did Baby Suggs think?"

"Same, but to listen to her, all her children is dead. Claimed she felt each one go the very day and hour."

"When did she say Halle went?"

"1855. Middle of March. The day my baby was born."

"You had that baby did you? Never thought you'd make it."

He chuckled. "Runnin off pregnant."

"Had to. Couldn't be no waiting." She lowered ^{her head} and thought, as he did, how unlikely it was that she had made it. And if it hadn't been for that girl looking for velvet, she never would have.

"All by yourself too." He was proud of her and annoyed by her. Proud she had done it; annoyed that she had not needed Halle or him in the doing.

"Almost by myself. Not all by myself. A white girl

helped me."

"Then she helped herself too, God bless her."

"You could stay the night, Paul D."

"You don't sound too steady in the offer."

Sethe glanced beyond his shoulder toward the screen door.

"Oh it's truly meant. I just hope you'll pardon my house. Come on in. Talk to Denver while I cook you up something."

Paul D tied his shoes together, hung them over his shoulder and followed her through the door straight into a pool of red and undulating light that locked him where he stood.

"You got company?" he whispered, frowning.

"Off and on," said Sethe.

"Good God," He backed out of the door, onto the porch. "What kind of evil you got in here?"

"It's not evil, just sad. Come on. Just step through."

He looked at her then closely. Closer than he had when she first rounded the house on wet and shining legs, holding her shoes and stockings up in one hand; her skirts in the other. Halle's girl--the one with iron eyes and backbone to match. He had never seen her hair in Kentucky. And though her face was eighteen years older than when last he saw her, it was softer now. Because of the hair. A face too still for comfort: irises the same color of her skin which, in that still face, used to make him think of a mask with punched out eyes. Halle's woman. Pregnant every year including the year she sat by the fire telling him she was going to run. Her three children she had already packed into a wagonload

of others in a caravan of Negroes crossing the river. They were to be left with Halle's mother near Cincinnati. Even in that tiny shack, leaning so close to the fire you could smell the heat in her dress, those iron eyes did not pick up a flicker of light. They were like two holes of dead black into which he had trouble gazing. So he looked instead at the fire while she told him, because her husband was not there for the telling. Mr. Garner was dead and his wife had a lump in her neck the size of a sweet potato and refused to listen or speak to anyone who did. So she leaned as close to the fire as her pregnant belly allowed and told him, Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men.

There had been five of them who belonged to the farm, Sethe the only female. Mrs. Garner, crying like a baby, had sold his two brothers to pay off the debts that surfaced the minute she was widowed. Then schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke two⁺ more Sweet Home men and punched the iron out of Sethe's eyes leaving two holes of dead black that did not reflect^t firelight.

Now the iron was back but the face, softened by hair, made him trust her enough to step inside her door smack into a pool of pulsing red light.

She was right. It was sad. Walking through it, a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry. It seemed a long way to the normal light surrounding the table, but he made it--dry-eyed and lucky.

"You said she died soft. Soft as cream," he reminded her.

"That's not Baby Suggs," she said.

"Who then?"

"My daughter. The one I sent ahead with the boys."

"She didn't live?"

"No. The one I was carrying when I run away is all I got left. Boys gone too. Both of em walked off just before Baby Suggs died."

Paul D looked at the spot where the grief had soaked him. The red was gone but a kind of weeping clung ^{to} the air where it had been.

Probably best, he thought. If a Negro got legs he ought to use them. Sit down too long, somebody will figure out a way to tie them up. Still...if her boys were gone...

"No man? You here by yourself?"

"Me and Denver," she said.

"That all right by you?"

"That's all right by me."

She saw his scepticism and continued. "I cook at a restaurant in town. And I sew a little on the sly."

Paul D smiled then remembering the bedding dress. Sethe was thirteen when she came to Sweet Home and already iron-eyed. She was a timely present for Mr. Garner who had lost Baby Suggs to her husband's high principles. The five Sweet Home men looked at the new girl and decided to let her be. They were young and so sick with the absence of women, they had taken to calves. Yet they let the iron eyed girl be, so she could choose in

spite of the fact that each one would have beaten the others to mush to have her. It took her a year to choose--a long, tough year of thrashing on pallets eaten up with dreams of her. A year of yearning, when rape seemed the solitary gift of life. The restraint they had exercised possible only because they were the Sweet Home men--the ones Mr. Garner bragged about while other farmers shook their heads in warning at the phrase. "Ya'll got boys," he told them. "Young boys, old boys, picky boys, stroppin boys. Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of em. Bought em thata way, raised em thata way. Men every one."

"Beg to differ, Garner. Ain't no nigger men."

"Not if you scared, they ain't." Garner's smile was wide.

"But if you a man yourself, you'll want your niggers to be men too."

"I wouldn't have no nigger men round my wife."

It was the reaction Garner loved and waited for. "Neither would I," he said. "Neither would I" and there was always a pause before the neighbor, or stranger, or peddler, or brother-in-law or whoever it was got the meaning. Then a fierce argument, sometimes a fight and Garner came home bruised and pleased, having demonstrated one more time what a real Kentuckian was: one tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men.

And so they were: Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo, the wild man. All in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing

on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new girl-- the one who took Baby Suggs' place after Halle bought her with five years of Sundays. Maybe that was why she chose him. A twenty-year old man so in love with his mother he gave up five years of Sabbaths just to see her sit down for a change was a serious recommendation.

She waited a year. And the Sweet home men abused cows while they waited with her. She chose Halle and for their first bedding she sewed herself a dress-on-the-sly.

"Won't you stay on a while? Can't nobody catch up on eighteen years in a day."

Out of the dimness of the room in which they sat a white staircase climbed toward the blue and white wallpaper of the second floor. Paul D could see just the beginning of the paper; discreet flecks of yellow sprinkled among a blizzard of snowdrops all backed by blue. The luminous white of the railing and steps kept him glancing toward it. Every sense he had told him the air above the stairwell was charmed and very thin. But the girl who walked down out of that air was round and brown with the face of an alert doll.

Paul D looked at the girl and then at Sethe who smiled saying "Here she is my Denver. This is Paul D, honey, from Sweet Home."

"Good morning, Mr. D."

"Garner, baby. Paul D Garner."

"Yes sir."

"Glad to get a look at you. Last time I saw your mama, you

were pushin out the front of her dress."

"Still is," Sethe smiled, "provided she can get in it."

Denver stood on the bottom step and was suddenly hot and shy. It had been a long time since good-willed women, preachers, speakers and newspaper men used to sit at their table, their sympathetic voices called liar by the revulsion in their eyes. For *12 years, long before* Grandma Baby died, there ~~were~~ ^{had been} no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends. Certainly no hazelnut man with too long hair and no notebook, no lead pencil, no ink pot, no questions. Someone her mother wanted to talk to and would even consider talking to while barefoot. Looking, in fact acting, like a girl instead of the quiet, queenly woman she had known all her life. The one who never looked away, who when a man got stomped to death by a mare right in front of Sawyer's restaurant did not look away; and when a sow began eating her own litter did not look away then either. And when the baby's spirit picked up Here Boy and slammed him into the ^a wall hard enough to break two of his legs and dislocate his eye, so hard he went into convulsions and chewed up his tongue, still her mother had not looked away. She had taken ~~a~~ ^{the} hammer, knocked the dog unconscious, wiped away the blood and saliva, pushed his eye back in his head and set his leg bones. He recovered, mute and off-balance, more because of his untrustworthy eye rather than his bent legs, and winter, summer, drizzle or dry, nothing could persuade him to enter the house again.

Now here was this woman with the presence of mind to repair a dog gone savage with pain rocking her crossed ankles and looking away from her own daughter's body. As though the size of it was more than vision could bear. And neither she nor he had on shoes. Hot, shy, now Denver was lonely. All that leaving: first her brothers, then her Grandmother and before any of them, playmates who did not welcome her in their games. None of that had mattered as long as her mother did not look away as she was doing now, making Denver long, down right long, for a sign of spite from the baby ghost.

"She's ~~a~~ fine looking young lady," said Paul D. F "Fine looking. Got her Daddy's sweet face."

"You know my father?"

"Knew him. Knew him well."

"Did he, Mama?" Denver fought an urge to re-align her affection.

"Of course he knew your Daddy. I told you he's from Sweet Home."

Denver sat down on the bottom step. There was no where else gracefully to go. They were a twosome, saying "Your daddy" and "Sweet Home" in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and not to her. That her own father's absence was ^{not} hers. Once the absence had belonged to Grandma Baby--a son, deeply mourned because he was the one who had bought her out of there. Then it was her mother's absent husband. Now it was this hazelnut stranger's absent friend. Only those who knew him

("knew him well") could claim his absence for themselves. Just as only those who lived in Sweet Home could remember it, whisper it and glance sideways at one another while they did. Again she wished for the baby ghost--its anger thrilling her now (where it used to wear her out. Wear her out.)

"We have a ghost in here," she said, and it worked. They were not a twosome anymore. Her mother left off swinging her feet and being girlish. Memory of Sweet Home dropped away from the man she was being girlish for's eyes. He looked quickly up the lightening white stairs behind her.

"So I hear," he said. "But sad, your mama said. Not evil."

"No sir," said Denver, "not evil. But not sad either."

"What then?"

"Rebuked. Lonely and rebuked."

"Is that right?" Paul D turned to Sethe.

"I don't know about lonely," said Denver's mother. "mad , maybe but I don't see how it could be lonely spending every minute with us like it does."

"Must be something you got it wants."

Sethe shrugged. "Just a baby."

"My sister," said Denver. "She died in this house."

Paul D scratched the hair under his jaw. "Reminds me of that headless bride back behind Sweet Home. Remember that, Sethe? Used to roam them woods regular."

"How could I forget. Worrisome...."

"How come everybody run off from Sweet Home can't stop talking bout it? Look like if it was so sweet you would have stayed."

"Girl who you talking to?"

Paul D laughed. "True, true. She's right Sethe. It wasn't sweet and it sure wasn't home." He shook his head.

"But it's where we were," said Sethe. "All together. Comes back whether we want it to or not." She shivered a little. A light ripple of skin on her arm which she caressed as if to soothe nerve endings back into sleep. "Denver," she said, "start up that stove. Can't have a friend stop by and don't feed him."

"Don't go to any trouble on my account," Paul D said.

"Bread ain't trouble. The rest I brought back from where I work. Least I can do, cooking from six in the morning to noon is bring dinner home. You got any objection to pike?"

"If he don't object to me I don't object to him."

At it again, thought Denver. Her back to them, she jabbed bits of paper into the kindlin laid out and ready for fire. "Why don't you spend the night, Mr. Garner? You and Mama can talk about Sweet Home all night long."

Sethe took two swift steps to the stove, but before she could yank Denver's head back, the girl leaned forward and began to cry.

"What is the matter with you? I have never known you to behave this way!"

"Leave her be," said Paul D. "I'm a stranger to her."

"That's just it. She got no cause to act up with a stranger. O baby, what is it? Did something happen?"

But Denver was shaking now and sobbing so she could not speak. The tears she had not shed for eight years wetting

her far too womanly breasts.

"I can't no more. I can't no more."

"Can't what? What can't you?"

"I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either."

"Honey, honey."

"What's she talking bout nobody speaks to you?" asked Paul D.

"It's the house. People don't---"

"It's not! It's not the house. It's us! And it's you!"

"Denver!"

"Leave off, Sethe. It's hard for a young girl living in a haunted house. That can't be easy."

"It's easier than some other things."

"Think, Sethe. I'm a grown man with nothing new left to see or do and I'm telling you it ain't easy. Maybe you all ought to move. Who owns this house?"

Over Denver's shoulder Sethe shot Paul D a look of snow. "I do now."

"Then sell it."

"No."

"Sethe."

"No moving. No selling. It's all right the way it is."

"You going to tell me it's all right with this child half out her mind?"

Something in the house braced and in the listening quiet that followed, Sethe spoke.

"I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in ^Wbetween but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running--from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth. I took ~~on~~ journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? It cost too much. Now sit down and eat with us or leave us be."

Paul D fished in his vest for ^athe little pouch of tobacco--concentrating on its contents and the knot of its string while Sethe led Denver into the keeping room that opened off the large room he was sitting in. He had no smoking papers, so he fiddled with the pouch and listened through the open door to Sethe quieting her daughter. When she came ~~back~~ back she avoided his look and went straight to a small table next to the stove. Her back was to him and he could see all the ^{hair}hair he wanted without the distraction of her face.

"What tree on your back?"

"Huh." Sethe put a bowl on the table and reached for flour.

"What tree on ~~yo~~ your back? Is something growing on your back? I don't see nothing growing on your back."

"It's there all the same."

"Who told you that?"

"White girl. That's what she called it. I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A choke

cherry tree. Trunk, branches and even leaves. Tiny little choke cherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know."

Sethe took a little spit from the tip of her tongue with her forefinger. Quickly, lightly she touched the stove. Then she trailed her fingers through the flour, parting, separating small hills and ridges of it looking for mites. Finding none, she poured soda and salt into the crease of her folded hand and tossed both into the flour. Then she reached into a can and scooped half a handful of lard. Deftly she squeezed the flour through it, then with her left hand sprinkling water, she formed the dough.

"I had milk," she said. "I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk ^{for} from my baby girl. I hadn't stopped nursing her when I sent her on ahead with Howard and Bugler."

Now she rolled the dough out with a wooden pin. "Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me he'd see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told

them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days, she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it."

"Men don't know anything much," said Paul D, tucking his pouch back into his vest pocket, "But they do know a suckling can't be away from its mother for long."

"Then they know what it's like to send your children off when your breasts are full."

"We was talking bout a tree, Sethe."

"After I left you. Those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Tied me up and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher opened up my back and when it closed, it made a tree. It grows there still."

"They used cowhide on you?"

"And they took my milk."

"They beat you and you was pregnant?"

"And they took my milk!"

The fat white circles of dough lined the pan in rows. Once more Sethe touched a wet forefinger to the stove. She opened the oven door and slid the pan of biscuits in. As she raised up from the heat she felt Paul D behind her and his hands under her breasts. She straighted up and knew, but could not feel, that his cheek was pressing into the branches of her choke cherry tree.

Not even trying, he had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could. There was something blessed in his manner. Women saw him and wanted to weep--to tell him that their chest hurt and their knees did too. Strong women and wise saw him and told him things they only told each other: that way past the Change of Life desire in them had suddenly become ~~enour~~^{for} enormous, greedy, more savage than when they were fifteen and that ~~it~~ embarrassed them and made them sad; that secretly they longed to die--to be quit of it--that sleep was more precious to them than any waking day. Young girls sidled up to him to confess or describe how well-dressed the visitations were that had followed them straight from their dreams. Therefore, although he did not understnad why this was so, he was not surprised when Denver dripped tears into the stovefire. Nor, fifteen minutes later, after telling him about her stolen milk, her mother wept as well. Behind her, bending down, his body an arc of kindness, he held her breasts in the palms of his hand. He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches. = Raising his fingers to the buttons of her dress, he knew without seeing them or hearing any sigh that the tears were coming fast. And when the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work

of an ironsmith too passionate for display, he could think but not say "Aw Lord, girl." And he would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years. What she knew was that the responsibility of her breasts, at last, was in someone else's hands.

Would there be a little space, she wondered, a little time, some way to hold off eventfulness, to push busyness into the corners of the room and just stand there a minute or two, naked from shoulder blade to waist, relieved of the weight of her breasts, smelling the stolen milk again and the pleasure of baking bread? Maybe this one time she could stop dead still in the middle of a cooking meal--not even leave the stove--and feel the hurt her back ought to. ~~TC~~ Trust things and remember things^g because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank?

MTK

Paul D had not trembled since 1860 and then for eighty-three days in a row. Locked up and chained down, his hands shook so bad he couldn't smoke or even scratch properly. Now he was trembling again but in the legs this time. It took him a while to realize that his legs were not shaking because of worry, but because the floor boards were and the grinding, shoving floor was only part of it. The house itself was pitching.

Sethe slid to the floor and struggled to get back into her dress. While down on all fours as though she were holding her house down on the ground, Denver burst from the keeping room, terror in her eyes, a vague smile on her lips.

"God damn it! Hush up!" Paul D was shouting, falling, reaching for anchor. "Leave the place alone! Get the hell out!" A table rushed toward him and he grabbed its leg. Somehow he managed to stand at an angle and, holding the table by two legs he bashed it about, wrecking everything, screaming back at the screaming house. "You want to fight, come on! God damn it! She got enough without you. She got enough!"

The quaking slowed to an occasional lurch, but Paul D did not stop whipping the table around until everything was rock quiet. Sweating and breathing hard, he leaned against the wall. Sethe was still crouched next to the stove clutching her salvaged shoes to her chest. The three of them Sethe, Denver and Paul D breathed to the same beat, like one tired person. Another breathing was just as tired.

It was gone. Denver wandered through the prestigious silence to the stove. She ashed over the fire and pulled the pan of biscuits from the oven. The jelly cupboard was on its back, a few of its contents lying in a heap in the corner of the bottom shelf. She took out a jar, and, looking around for a plate, found half of one by the door. These things she

carried out to the porch steps where she sat down.

The two of them had gone up there. Stepping lightly, easy-footed they had climbed the white stairs. Leaving her down below. She pried the wire from the top of the jar and then the lid. Under it was cloth and under that a thin cake of wax. She removed it all and coaxed the jelly onto one half of the half a plate. She took a biscuit and pulled off its black top. Smoke curled from the soft white insides.

She missed her brothers. Bugler and Howard would be twenty-two and twenty now. And Baby Suggs.

Her mother was upstairs with the man who had gotten rid of the only other company she had. Denver dipped a bit of bread into the jelly. Slowly, methodically, miserably she ate it.

kissing the wrought iron on her back had shook the house, had made it necessary for him to beat it to pieces. Now he would do more.

She led him to the top of the stairs where light came straight from the sky because the second story windows of that house had been placed in the ceiling and not the walls. There were two rooms and she took him into one of them hoping he wouldn't mind the fact that she was not prepared that though she could remember desire, she had forgotten how it worked; the clutch and helplessness that resided in the hands; how blindness was altered so that what leapt to the eye were places to lie down, and all else: door knobs, straps, buttons and the passing of time, was interference.

Chapter 2

Not quite in a hurry, but losing no time, Sethe and Paul D climbed the white stairs. Overwhelmed as much by the downright luck of finding her house and her in it, as by the certainty of giving her his sex, Paul D dropped twenty-five years from his recent memory. A stair step before him was Baby Suggs replacement, the new girl they dreamed of at night and fucked cows for at dawn while waiting for her to choose. Merely kissing the wrought iron on her back had shook the house, had made it necessary for him to beat it to pieces. Now he would do more.

She led him to the ^qstop of the stairs where light came straight from the sky because the second ^{pitched} story windows of that house had been placed in the [^]ceiling and not the walls. There were two rooms and she took him into one ^{of} them hoping he wouldn't mind the fact that she was not prepared; that though she could remember desire, she had forgotten how it worked; the clutch and helplessness that resided in the hands; how blindness was altered so that what leapt to the eye were places to lie down, and all else: door knobs, straps, buttons and the passing of time, was interference.

It was over before they could get their clothes off. Half-dressed and short of breath, they lay side by side ^{and the sky light above them.} resentful of one another. His dreaming of her had been too long and too long ago. Her deprivation had been not having any dreams of her own at all. Now they were so shy and too shy to make talk.

Sethe lay on her back, her head turned from him. Out of the corner of his eye, Paul D saw the float of her breasts and disliked it, the spread-away, flat, roundness of them that he could definitely live without, ^{never}mind that down stairs he had held them as though they were the most expensive part of himself. And the wrought iron maze he had explored in the kitchen like a gold miner pawing through pay dirt was in fact a revolting clump of scars. Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did since way back when he took the mid day meal in the fields. Always in the same place if he could, and choosing the place had been hard because Sweet Home had more pretty trees than any farm around. His choice he called Brother, and sat under it, alone sometimes, sometimes with Halle or the two other Pauls, but more often with Sixo who was gentle then and still speaking English. Indigo with a flame red tongue, Sixo experimented with night-

cooked potatoes, trying to pin down exactly when to put
 smoking hot rocks in a hole, potatoes on top, and cover
 the whole thing with twigs so that by the time they broke
 for the meal, hitched the animals, left the field and got
 to Brother, the potatoes would be at the peak of perfection.
 He might get up in the middle of the night, go all the way
 out there, start the earth oven by starlight; or he would make
 the stones less hot and put the next day's potatoes on them
 right after the meal. He never got it right, but they ate
 those undercooked, overcooked, dried out or raw potatoes
 anyway, laughing, spitting and giving him advice. Time
 never worked the way Sixo thought, so of course he never
 got it right. Once he plotted down to the minute a thirty-
 mile trip to see a woman. He left on a Saturday when the
 moon was in the place he wanted it to be, arrived at her cabin
 before church on Sunday and had just enough time to say good
 morning before he had to start back again so he'd make the field
 call on time Monday morning. He had walked for seventeen hours,
 sat down for one, turned around and walked seventeen more. Halle
 and the Pauls spent the whole day covering Sixo's fatigue from
 Mr. Garner. They ate no potatoes that day, sweet or white.
 Sprawled near Brother, his flame red tongue hidden from them,
 his indigo face closed, Sixo slept through dinner like a baby.
 Now there was a man, and that was a tree. Himself lying
 in the bed, and the "tree" lying next to him didn't compare.

Paul D looked through the window above his feet and folded his hands behind his head. An elbow grazed Sethe's shoulder. The touch of cloth on her skin startled her. She had forgotten he had not taken off his shirt. Dog, she thought, and then remembered that she had not allowed him the time for taking it off. Nor herself ^{time} to take off her petticoat and considering she had begun undressing before she saw him on the porch, that her shoes and stockings ^g were already in her hand and she had never put them back on; that he had looked at her wet bare feet and asked to join her; that when she rose ^e to cook he had undressed her further, considering how quickly they had started getting naked, you'd think by now they would be. But maybe a man really was nothing but a man, which is what Baby Suggs always said. They encouraged you to put some of your weight in their hands and soon as you felt how light and lovely that was, they studied your scars and tribulations, after which they did what he had done: ran her children out and tore up the house. She needed to get up from there, go down stairs and piece it all back together. This house he told her to leave as though a house was a little thing-- a shirtwaist or a sewing basket you could walk off from or give away any old time. She who had never had one but this one; she who left a dirt floor to come to this one; she who had to bring a fistful of gentian into Mrs. Garner's kitchen everyday just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was

hers because she wanted to love the work she did, to take the ugly out of it and the only way she could feel at home on Sweet Home was if she picked some pretty growing thing and took it with her. The day she forgot was the day butter wouldn't come or the brine in the barrel blistered her arms. At least it seemed so. A few gentians on the table, some myrtle tied around the handle of the flat iron holding the door open for a breeze calmed her and when Mrs. Garner and she sat down to sort bristle, or make ink she felt fine. Fine. Not scared of the men beyond. The five who slept in quarters near her, but never came in the night. Just touched their raggedy hats when they saw her and stared. And if she brought food to them in the fields, bacon and bread wrapped in a piece of clean sheeting, they never took it from her hands. They stood back and waited for her to put it on the ground (at the foot of a tree) and leave. Either they did not want to take anything from her, or did not want her ~~to~~ ^{to} see them eat. Twice or three times she lingered. Hidden behind honeysuckle she watched them. How different they were without her, how they laughed and played and urinated and sang. All but Sixo who laughed once--at the very end. Halle, of course, was the nicest. Baby Suggs' eighth and last child who rented himself out all over the county to buy her way from there. But he too, as it turned out, was nothing but a man.

marriage to that "somebody" son who had fathered every one

"A man ain't nothing but a man," said Baby Suggs. "But a son? Well now, that's somebody."

It made sense for a lot of reasons because in all of Baby's life, as well as her own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen and seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A life time. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye; to make up for giving sex for four months to a straw boss in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her--only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who ^{promised} ~~promised~~ not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not, "God take what He would," she said. And He did, and He did, and He did and then gave her Halle who gave her freedom when it didn't mean a thing.

Sethe had the amazing luck of five whole years of marriage to that "somebody" son who had fathered every one

of her children. A blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted, lean on, as though Sweet Home really was one. As though a handful of myrtle stuck in the handle of a pressing iron propped against the door in a white woman's kitchen could make it hers. As though mint sprig in the mouth changed the breath as well as its odor. A bigger fool never lived.

Sethe started to turn over on her stomach but changed her mind. She did not want to call Paul D's attention back to her, so she settled for crossing her ankles.

But Paul D noticed the movement as well as the change in her breathing. He felt obliged to try again, slower this time, but the appetite was gone. Actually it was a good feeling--not wanting her. Twenty-five years and blip! The kind of thing Sixo would do--like the time he arranged a meeting with Ella, the Thirty-Mile-Woman. It took three months and two thirty-four mile round trips to do it. To persuade her to walk one third of the way toward him, to a place he knew. A deserted : stone structure that Redmen used ^{way back} ~~a long time ago~~ when they thought the land was theirs. ^{-Sixo-} On one of Sixo's night creeps he had discovered it, j^{ut} off the tk Road and asked its permission to enter. Inside, having felt what it felt like, he asked the ~~long ago~~ ^{presence} Redmen if he could bring his woman there, ^{It} ~~They~~ said yes and Sixo painstakingly instructed her how to get there, exactly when to start out, how his welcoming or

*Sixo discovered it
on one of his
night creeps, just off...*

warming whistles would sound. Since neither could go
 anywhere on business of their own, and since the Thirty-Mile-
 Woman was already fourteen and scheduled for somebody's
 arms, ^{the danger was real.} ~~there was real danger.~~ When he arrived, she had not. He
 whistled and got no answer. He went into the Redmen's
 deserted lodge. She was not there. He returned to the
 meeting spot. She was not there. He waited longer. ^{She}
 still did not come. He grew frightened for her and ^{walked}
 down the road in the direction she should be taking. ^{Three or}
 four miles, and he stopped. It was hopeless to go on ^{that}
 way, so he stood in the wind and ^{asked} for help. Listening
 close for some sign he heard a whimper. He turned toward
 it, waited and heard it again. Uncautious now, he hollered
 her name. She ^e answered in a voice that sounded like life to
 him--not death. "Stand there," he shouted, "Breathe hard
 and I can find you." He did. She believed she was already
 at the meeting place and was crying because she thought he
 had not kept his promise. NOW it was too late for the rendezvous^z
 to happen at the Redmen's house, so they dropped where they
 were. Later he punctured her calf to simulate snake bite so
 she could use it in some way as an excuse for not being on
 time to shake worms from tobacco leaves. He gave her ^a detailed
 directions about following the stream as a short cut back, and
 saw her off. When he got to the road it was very light and he
 had his clothes in his hands. Suddenly from around a bend a wagon

the danger was
 real.

trundled toward him. Its driver, wide-eyed, raised a whip while the woman seated beside him covered her face. But Sixo had already melted into the woods ^{before} the lash could unfurl itself on his indigo behind.

He told the story to Paul F, Halle. Paul A ~~and~~ Paul D in the peculiar way which made them cry-laugh.
MTK (Sixo's language)

But that was before he stopped speaking English because there was no future in it. Because of the Thirty-Mile-Woman Sixo was the only one not paralyzed by yearning for Sethe. Nothing could be as good as the sex ^{with her} Paul D had been imagining ^{with her} off and on for twenty-five years. His foolishness made him smile and think fondly of himself and in this creamy self-amusement he turned over on his side ^{facing her}. Sethe's eyes were closed, her hair a mess. Looked at this way, minus the iron eyes, her face was not so attractive. So it must have been her eyes that kept him both guarded and stirred up. Without them her face was manageable--a face he could handle. Maybe if she would keep them closed like that....Nice mouth. Halle never knew what he had.

Although her eyes were closed, Sethe knew his gaze was on her face. A paper picture of just how bad she must look quickly raised itself up before her mind's eye. Still, the absence of derision coming from his gaze was marked. Soft. It

"Halle's nice, Sethe. We'll be good to you."

"But I mean we want to get married."

felt soft. He was not judging her--or rather he was judging but not comparing her. Not since Halle had a man looked at her that way: not loving or passionate, but interested as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality. Halle was more like a brother than a husband. His care suggested a family relationship rather than a man's laying claim. For years they saw each other in full daylight only on Sundays. The rest of the time they spoke or touched or ate in darkness. Pre-dawn darkness and the afterⁱlight of sunset. So looking at each other intently was a Sunday morning pleasure and Halle examined her as though storing up what he saw in sunlight for the shadow he saw the rest of the week. And he had so little time. After his Sweet Home work and on Sunday afternoons was the debt work he owed for his mother. When he asked her to be his wife, Sethe happily agreed and then was stuck not knowing the next step. There should be a ceremony, shouldn't there? A preacher, a party, a something. She and Mrs. Garner were the only women there, so she decided to ask her.

"Halle and me want to be married, Mrs. Garner."

"So I heard," she ^Y smiled. "He talked to Mr. Garner about it. Are you already expecting?"

"No, Ma'am."

"Well you will be. You know that don't you?"

"Yes Ma'am."

"Halle's nice, Sethe. He'll be good to you."

"But I mean we want to get married."

"You just said so. And I said all right."

"Is there a wedding?"

Mrs. Garner put down her cooking spoon^r. Laughing a little she touched Sethe on the head saying, "You are one sweet child." And then no more.

Sethe made a dress-on-the-sly and Halle hung his hitching rope from a nail on the wall of her cabin. And there on top of a mattress on top of the dirt floor of the cabin they had sex for the ^rthird time, the first two having been in the tiny Cornfield Mr. Garner kept because it was a crop animals could use as well as humans. Both Halle and Sethe were under the impression that they were hidden. Scrunched down among the stalks, they couldn't see anything, including the corn tops waving over their heads ~~and~~ visible to everybody else.

Sethe smiled at her and Halle's stupidity. Even the crows knew and came to look. Uncrossing her ankles, she managed not to laugh aloud.

The jump, thought Paul D, from a calf to a girl wasn't all that mighty. Not the leap Halle believed it would be. And taking her in the corn rather than her quarters, a yard away from the cabins of the others who had lost out, was a gesture of tenderness. ^{Halle} ~~He~~ wanted privacy for her and got public display. Who could miss a ripple in a cornfield on a quiet cloudless day? He, Sixo and both of the Pauls sat

under Brother pouring water from a ^{gourd} ~~gourd~~ over their heads, and through eyes streaming with well water, ^{that} ~~watched~~ the confusion of tassles in the field below. It had been hard, hard, hard sitting there erect as dogs, watching corn stalks dance at noon. The water running over their heads made it worse.

Paul D sighed and turned over. Sethe took the opportunity afforded by his movement to shift as well. Looking at Paul D's back, she remembered ^t ~~that~~ some of the corn stalks broke, folded down over Halle's back and among the things her fingers clutched were husk and cornsilk hair.

How loose the silk. How jailed down the juice.

The jealous admiration of the ^{watching men} ~~observers~~ ^{melted with} ~~was assuaged~~ ~~a bit~~ the feast of new corn they allowed themselves that night. Plucked from the broken stalks that Mr. Garner could not doubt was the fault of raccoon. Paul F wanted his roasted; Paul A wanted his boiled and now Paul D couldn't remember how finally they'd cooked those ears too young to eat. What he did remember was ^s parting the hair to get to the tip, the edge of his fingernail just under, so as not to graze a single kernel.

Pulling down the tight sheath, the ripping sound always convinced her it hurt.

As soon as one leaf of the husk was down, the rest obeyed and the ear yielded up to him its shy rows, exposed at last.

How loose the silk. How quick the jailed up flavor ran free.

as they
watched
melted

Chapter 3

No matter what all your teeth and wet fingers anticipated, there was no accounting for the way that simple joy could shake you.

: How loose the silk. How fine and loose and free.

Denver's secrets were sweet. Accompanied every time by wild veronica until she discovered cologne. The first bottle was a gift, the rest she stole, and hid among boxwood until it froze and cracked. That was the year winter came in a hurry at supertime and stayed eight months. Back beyond 124 was a narrow field that stopped itself at a wood. On the yonder side of these woods, a stream. In these woods, between the field and the stream, hidden by post oaks, four boxwood bushes, planted in a ring, had started stretching toward each other five feet off the ground to form a round, empty room seven feet high, its walls fifteen inches of murmuring leaves.

Bent low, Denver could crawl into this room and once there she could stand all the way up in emerald light.

It began as a little girl's houseplay but as her desires changed, so did the play. Quiet, private and completely secret except for the noisome cologne signal that thrilled

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It began as a little girl's houseplay but as her desires changed, so did the play. Quiet, primate and completely secret except for the noisome cologne signal that thrilled

the rabbits before it confused them. First a game room, then a refuge, soon the place became the point. In that bower, closed off from the hurt of the hurt world, Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. Wore her out. Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear and salvation was as easy as a wish.

Once when she was in the boxwood, the autumn before Paul D moved into the house with her mother, she was made suddenly cold by a combination of wind and the perfume on her skin. She dressed herself, bent down to leave and stood up in snowfall: a thin and whipping snow very like the picture her mother had painted as she described the circumstances of Denver's birth in a canoe straddled by a white girl for whom she was named.

Shivering, Denver approached the house, regarding it, as she always did, as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits. Her steps and her gaze were the cautious ones of a child approaching a nervous, idle relative (someone dependent but proud). A breast plate of darkness hid all the windows except one. Its dim glow came from Baby Suggs' room. When Denver looked in, she saw her mother in prayer on her knees, which was not unusual. What was unusual (even for a girl who had lived all her life in a house peopled by the living activity of the dead)

was that a white dress knelt down next to her mother and had its sleeve around her mother's waist. And it was the tender embrace of the dress sleeve that made Denver remember the details of her birth--that and the thin, whipping snow she was standing in, like the spores of ^{COMMON} ~~tiny~~ flowers. The dress and her mother together looked like two friendly grown up women--one (the dress) helping out the other. And the magic of her birth, its miracle in fact, testified to that friendliness as did her own name.

Easily she stepped into the told story which lay before her eyes on the path she followed away from the window, around the back of the house, past the privy, near the cold room, on around to the porch. To get to the part she liked best, she had to start at the beginning: hear the birds in the thick woods, the crunch of leaves underfoot; see her mother making her way up into the hills where no houses were likely to be. How Sethe was walking on two feet meant for standing still. How they were so swollen she could not see her arch or feel her ankles. Her leg shaft ended in a loaf of flesh scalloped by five toe nails. But she could not, would not, stop for when she did the little antelope rammed her with horns and pawed the ground of her womb with impatient hooves. While she was walking, it seemed to graze, quietly--so she walked, on two feet meant, in this sixth month of pregnancy, for standing still. Still, near a kettle;

still, at the churn; still, at the tub and ironing board. Milk, sticky and sour on her dress, attracted every small flying thing from gnats to grasshoppers. By the time she reached TK she had long ago stopped waving them off. The clanging in her head, begun as a church bell heard from a distance, was by then a tight cap of pealing bells around her ears. She sank and had to look down to see whether she was in a hole or kneeling. Nothing was alive but her nipples and the little antelope. Finally, she was horizontal--or must have been because blades of wild onion were scratching her temple and her cheek. Concerned as she was for the life of her children's mother, nevertheless, Sethe said she remembered thinking: "Well, at least I don't have to take another step." A dying thought if ever there was one, and she waited for the little antelope to protest and why she thought of an antelope Sethe could not imagine since she had never seen one. She guessed it must have been an invention held on to from before Sweet Home, when she was very young. Of that place where she was born (probably Carolina) she remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother who was pointed out to her by the eight year old child who watched over the young ones--pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her stooping in a field. Patiently Sethe wait^ed for this particular back to gain the row's end and stand. What she saw was a cloth hat as opposed to a straw one, singularity enough in that world of cooing women each of whom was called Ma'am.

"Seth-thuh."

"Ma'am?"

"Hold on to the baby."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Seth-thuh."

"Ma'am?"

"Get some kindling in here."

"Yes, Ma'am."

O but when they sang. And O but when they danced and some times they danced the antelope. The ^{men}~~man~~ as well as the Ma'ams, one of whom was certainly ^{her}~~how~~ own. They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like this one in her stomach.

"I believe this baby's Ma'am is gonna die in wild onions on the ^L~~boody~~ side of the Ohio River." That's what was on her mind and what she told Denver. Her exact words. And it didn't seem suhh a bad idea, all in all, in view of the step she would not have to take, but the thought of herself stretched out dead while the little antelope lived on--an hour? a day? a day and a night? in her lifeless body grieved her so, she made the groan that made the person walking on a path not ten yards away ^{halt}~~hold~~ and stand right still. Sethe had not heard the walking, but suddenly she heard the standing still and then she smelled the hair. The voice, saying "Who's in there? was all

she needed to know that she was about to be discovered by a white boy. That on a ridge of myrtle near the Ohio River, trying to get to her three children, one of whom was starving for the food she carried; that after her husband had disappeared and got himself hung no doubt; that after her milk had been stolen, her back pulped, her children orphaned, she was not to have an easeful death. NO.

She told Denver that a something came up out of the earth into her--like a freezing, but moving too, like jaws inside. "Look like I was just cold jaws grinding," she said. Suddenly she was eager for his eyes, to bite into them; to gnaw his cheek.

"I was hungry," she told Denver, "just as hungry as I could be for his eyes. I couldn't wait."

So she raised up on her elbow and dragged herself, one pull, two, three, four, toward the young white voice talking about

"Who that back in there?"

"Come see," I was thinking. 'Be the last thing you behold,' and sure enough here come the feet so I thought well that's where I'll have to start God do what He would, I'm gonna eat his feet off. I'm laughing now, but it's true. I wasn't just set to do it. I was hungry to do it. Like a snake. All jaws and hungry.

"It wasn't no white boy at all. Was a girl. The raggiest looking trash I ever saw saying 'Look there. A nigger. If that don't beat all.'"

Combining her hair with her fingers, she slowly surveyed the landscape once more. Satisfied nothing else was around, And now the part Denver loved the best. ⁹ Her name was Amy and she needed beef and pot liquor like nobody in this world. Arms like cane stalks and enough hair for four or five heads. Slow moving eyes. She didn't look at anything quick. Talked so much it wasn't clear how she could breathe at the same time. And those cane stalk arms, as it turned out, were as strong as iron.

"You bout the scariest looking something I ever seen. What you doing back up in here."

Down in the grass, like the snake she believed she was, Sethe opened her mouth, and instead of fangs and a split tongue, out shot the truth.

"Running," Sethe told her.

"Them the feet you running on? My Jesus my." She squatted down and stared at Sethe's feet. "You got anything on you [↑]pass for food, gal?"

"No," Sethe tried to shift to a sitting position but couldn't.

"I like to die I'm so hungry." The girl moved her eyes slowly, examining ^{IN} the greenery around her. "Thought there'd be huckleberries. Look like. That's why I come up in here. Didn't expect to find no nigger woman. If they was any, birds ate em. You like huckleberries?"

"I'm having a baby, miss."

Amy looked at her. "That mean you don't have no appetite? Well I got to eat me something."

Combing her hair with her fingers, she slowly surveyed the landscape once more. Satisfied nothing edible was around, she stood up to go and Sethe's heart stood up too at the thought of being left alone in the grass without a fang in her head.

"Where you on your way to, miss?"

She turned and looked at Sethe with freshly lit eyes. "Boston. Get me some velvet. Its a store there called TK. I seen the picture of it and they have the prettiest velvet. They don't believe I'm a get it, but I am."

Sethe nodded and shifted her elbow. "Your mama know you on the look out for velvet?"

The girl shook her hair out of her face. "My mama worked for these here people to pay for her passage. But then she had me and since she died right after, well, they said I had to wrok for em to pay it off. I did, but now I want me some velvet."

They did not look directly at each other, not straight into the eyes anyway. Yet they slipped effortlessly into yard chat about nothing in particular--except one lay on the ground.

"Boston," said Sethe. "Is that far?"

"Oooo, yeah. A hundred miles. Maybe more."

"Must be velvet closer by."

"Not like in Boston. Boston got the best. Be so pretty on me. You ever touch it?"

"No, miss. I never touched no velvet." Sethe didn't know if it was the voice, or Boston or velvet, but while the white girl talked, the baby slept. Not one butt or kick, so she guessed her luck had turned.

"Ever see any?" she asked Sethe. "I bet you never even seen any."

"If I did I didn't know it. What's it like, velvet?"

Amy dragged her eyes over Sethe's face as though she would never give out so confidential a piece of information as that to a perfect stranger.

"What they call you?" she asked.

However far she was from Sweet Home, there was no point in giving out her real name to the first person she saw. "Sister," said Sethe.

"Well, Sister, velvet is like the world was just born. Clean and new and amooth. The velvet I seen was brown, but in Boston they got all colors. Carmine. That means red but when you talk about velvet you got to say carmine." She raised her eyes to the sky and then, as though she had wasted enough time away from Boston, she moved off saying, "I gotta go."

Picking her way through the brush she hollered back to Sethe, "What you gonna do, just lie there and foal?"

"I can't get up from here," said Sethe.

"What?" She stopped and turned to hear.

"I said I can't get up."

Amy drew her arm across her nose and came slowly back to where Sethe lay. "It's a house back yonder," she said.

"A house?"

"Mmmmm. I passed it. Ain't no real regular house with

people in it though. A lean to, kinda."

"How far?"

"Make a difference, does it? You stay the night here snake get you."

"Well he may as well come on. I can't stand up let alone walk and God help me, miss, I can't crawl."

"Sure you can Sister. Come on," said Amy and with a toss of hair enough for five heads, she moved toward the path.

So she crawled and Amy walked along side her, and when Sethe needed to rest, Amy stopped too and talked some more about Boston and velvet and good things to eat. The sound of that voice, like a sixteen year old boy, going on and on and on kept the little antelope quiet and grazing. During that whole hateful crawl to the lean to, it never bucked once.

Nothing of Sethe's was intact by the time they reached it except the cloth that covered her hair. Below her bloody knees, there was no feeling at all; her chest was two cushions of pins. It was the voice full of velvet and Boston and good things to eat that urged her along and made her think that maybe she wasn't, after all, just a crawling graveyard for a six month baby's last hours.

The lean to was full of leaves which Amy pushed into a pile for Sethe to lie on. Then she gathered rocks, covered them with more leaves and made Sethe put her feet on them saying

"I know a woman had her feet cut off they was so swole."

And she made sawing gestures with the blade of her hand across Sethe's ankles. "Zzz Zzz Zzz Zzz/,"

"I used to be a good size. Nice arms and everything. Wouldn't think it, would you? That was before they put me in the root cellar. I was fishing off the Beaver once. Catfish in Beaver River sweet as chicken. Well I was just fishing there and a nigger floated right be me. I don't like drowned people, you? Your feet remind me of him. All swole like."

Then she did the magic: lifted Sethe's feet and legs and massaged them until she cried salt tears.

"It's gonna hurt, now," said Amy. "Anything dead coming back to life hurts."

A truth for all times, thought Denver. Maybe the white dress holding its arms around her mother's waist was in pain. If so it could mean the baby ghost had plans. When she stepped into the kitchen, Sethe was just leaving the keeping room.

"I saw a whie dress holding on to you," Denver said.

"White? Maybe it was my bedding dress. Describe it to me."

xxxxx~~xxxxxx~~

"Had a high neck. Whole mess of buttons coming down the back."

"Buttons. Well that lets out my bedding dress. I never had a button on nothing."

"Did Grandma Baby?"

Sethe shook her head. "She couldn't handle them. Even on her shoes. What else?"

"A bunch at the back. On the sit down part."

"A bustle? It had a bustle?"

"I don't know what it's called."

"Sort of gathered-like? Below the waist in the back?"

"Um hm."

"A rich lady's dress. Silk?"

"Cotton, looklike."

"Lisle probably. White cotton lisle. You say it was holding on to me. How?"

"Like you. It looked just like you. Kneeling next to you while you were praying. Had its arm around your waist."

"Well, I'll be."

"What were you praying for, Mama?"

"Not for anything. I don't pray. ^{any more} I just talk,"

"What were you talking about?"

You won't understand, baby."

^{yes}
"Uh huh I will."

yes
"I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was ~~my~~ rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not... Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place, the picture of it--stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a real picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die the picture of what I did or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place

where it happened."

"Can other people see it?" asked Denver.

"O yes. O yes, yes, yes. Some day you'll be walking down the road and you'll hear something or see some thing going on. So clear. And you think its you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm--every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still thaere and what's more, if you go there--you who never was thare--if you go there and stand in the place where it was--it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Beeause even though it's all over--over and done with--it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out . No matter what."

Denver picked at her fingernails. "If its still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies."

Sethe looked right in Denver's face. "Nothing ever does," she said.

"You never told me all what happened. Just that they whipped you and you run off, pregnant. With me."

TK

"He was a little man. Short. Always wore a collar, even in the firlds. A school teacher, she said. That made her feel

good--that her husband's sister's husband had book learning and was willing to come farm Sweet Home after Mr. Garner passed. The men could of done ie. The five Sweet Home men, but itr was like Halle siad. She didn't want to be the only white person on the farm and a woman too. So she was satisfied when the school teacher agreed to come. He brought two boys wih him. Sons of nep¹/₂hews, I don't know. They called him Onka and had pretty manners all of em. Talked soft and spit in handkerchiefs. Gentle in a lot of ways. You know, the kind who know Jesus by his first name, but out of politeness never use it even to His face. A pretty good farmer, Halle siad. Not strong as Mr. Garner but smart enough. He like^d the ink I made. It was her recêpe, but he preferred how I mixed it and it was important to him because at night he sat down to write in his book. It was a book about us but we didn't know that right away. We just thought it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said. I still think It was them questions that tore Sixo up. Tore him up for all time."

She stopped.

Denver knew that her mother was through with it--for now anyway. The single slow blink of her eyes; the bottom lip sliding up slowly to cover the top; and the a nostril sigh, like the snuf of a cnadle flame--it was Sethe's pattern of closure, the point beyond which she would not go.

"Well, I think the baby got plans, " said Denver.

"What plans?"

"I don't know, but the dress holding on to you got to mean something."

"Maybe," said Sethe. "Maybe it does have plans."

Whatever they were or might have been, within the year, Paul D messed them up for good. With a table and a loud male voice he had rid 124 of its claim to local fame. Denver had learned to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them ; the assumption that the haunting was an evil thing caused by an evil looking for more. None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting, but knowing the things behind things..

Gone now. Whoosed away in the blast^h of a hazel-nut man's shout, leaving Denver's world flat, mostly, with the exception of an emerald closet standing seven feet high in the woods.

Plans. The morning after Paul D came Sethe smiled just thinking about what the word could mean. It was a luxury she had not had in eighteen years and only that once. Before and since, all her effort was directed not on avoiding pain but in getting through it as quickly as possible.

The one set of plans she had made--getting away from Sweet Home--went awry so completely she never dared life by making more.

Yet the morning she woke up next to Paul D , the word Denver had ^sued a year ago did cross her mind and she thought

about what Denver had seen kneeling next to her, and thought also of the temptation to trust and remember that gripped her as she stood before the cooking stove in his arms. Would it be all right? Would it be all right to go ahead and feel? Go ahead and count on something?

She couldn't think clearly, lying next to him, listening to his breathing, so carefully, carefully, she ~~left~~ had left the bed.

Return (10)
+

57

where she ^{always} went to 'talk' - think -

~~Kneeling in the keeping room~~ it was clear why Baby Suggs was so starved for color. There wasn't any except for two orange squares in a quilt that made the absence shout. The walls of the room were slate, the floor earth brown, the wooden dresser the color of itself, curtains white and the dominating feature, the quilt over an iron cot, was made up of scraps of blue serge, black ~~wool~~, brown ~~wool~~ grey wool--the full range of the dark and muted that thrift and modesty allowed. In that sober field two patches of orange looked wild--like life in the raw.

Sethe looked at her hands, her bottle green sleeves and thought how little color there was in the house and how strange that she had not missed it the way Baby did. Deliberate, she thought, it must be deliberate because the ^alost color she remembered was the pink chips in the headstone of her baby girl. After that she became as color conscious as a hen. Every dawn she worked at fruit pies, fancy cakes, and vegetables while the chief cook did the meats, sauces and all the rest. And she could not remember remembering a molly apple or a yellow squash. Every dawn she saw the dawn, but never acknowledged or remarked its color. ~~Surely~~ there was something wrong with that. It was as though one day she saw a red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips and that was the last of it.

124 was so full of strong feeling, perhaps she was oblivious to the loss of anything at all. There was no room for anything or body else until Paul D. arrived and broke the ^{up} place, making room, shifting it, moving it over to some place else, then standing in the place he had made.

the morning after Paul D. came
So kneeling the in keeping room ~~for an evening talk~~, she was distracted by ^{the} two orange squares ^{that} signalled how barren 124 really was.

He was responsible for that. Emotions sped to the surface in his company. Things became what they were: drabness looked drab; heat was hot. Windows suddenly had view. *And wouldn't you know*
he'd be a singing man.

"Little rice, little bean

No meat in between

Hard work ain't easy

Dry bread ain't greasy

^{up now and}
He was singing as he mended the things he had broken, the day before. Some old peices of song he'd learned in the war or the prison farm that followed it. Nothing like wahty they sang at Sweet Home where yearning fashioned every note.

The songs he made now were flat-headed nails pounding and pounding and pounding deep into his feet and palms.

Lay my head on the railfoad line

Train come along, pacify my mind.

If I had my weight in lime

I'd whip my captain til he went stone blind

Fice cent nickel

ten cent dime

~~XXXXXX~~ Rucking rocks is busit

Rusting rocks is busting time

But they didn't fit, these songs. They were too loud, had too much power for the little house chores he was engaged in--resetting table legs; glazing.

He couldn't go back to "Storm upon the waters " that ^{they sang under} the trees of Sweet Home, so he contented himself with ^a, mmmmmmm, throwing in a line if one occurred to him and what occurred over and over was "Bare feet and chamomile sap/ Took off my shoes; took off my hat.

It was tempting to change the ~~xxxxx~~ words (gimme back my shoes; gimmie back my hat), because he didn't believe he could live with a woman --any woman-- for over two ^{out} of three months. That was about as long as he could abide one place. After ~~two years~~ of Alfred, Georgia where he slept underground and crawled into sunlight for the sole purpose of breaking rock, walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convinced himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains.

But this was not a normal woman in a normal house. As soon as he had stepped through the red light he knew that, compared to 124,

After Alfred

the rest of the world was bald. He had shut down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him to walk, eat sleep, sing. If he could do those things--with a little work and a little sex thrown in--he asked for no more, for more required him to dwell on Halle's face and Sixo ~~is~~ laughing. *To recall*

Trembling in a box built into the ground. Grateful for the daylight spent doing mule work in a quarry because he did not tremble when he had a hammer in his hands. The box had done what ~~he xxx~~; the war had not, what Sweet Home had not, what working like a ass and living like a dog had not: drove him crazy ^{so} ~~wo~~ he would not lose his mind.

By the time he got to Ohio then to Cincinnati, then to Halle Suggs' mama's house, he thought he had seen and felt it all.

Even now as he put back the window frame he had smashed, he could not account for the pleasure in his surprise at seeing Halle's wife alive, barefoot with uncovered hair--walking around the corner of the house with her shoes and stockings in her hand. The closed portion of his head opened like a greased lock.

###

I was thinking of looking for work around here. What you think?

Ain't much. River mostly.

Well I never ~~worked~~ ^{worked} on water, but I can pick up anything heavy as me.

White people meaner here than Kentucky. You may have to scramble

some.

It's not whether I scaramble; it's where. YOu saying it's all right to scramble here?

Better than all right.

Your girl, Denver. Seems to me she's of a different mind.

Why you say that?

She's got a waiting way about her. Something she's ~~xx~~ expecting. and it aint' me.

I don't know what it could be.

Well, whatever it is, she believes I'm interrupting it.

D Don 't worry about her^g. She's a charmed child. From the beginning.

Is that right?

Uh huh. Nothing bad can happen to her. Look at it. Everybody I knew dead or gone or dead and gone. NOT her. NOT my Denver. Even when I was carrying her, when it got clear that I wasn't going to make it--which meant she wasn't goinng to make it either--she ~~wax~~ pulled a white girl out the hill^{of}. The last thing ;you'd expect to help. And when the school teacher found us and came busin^tg in here with the law and a ;shotgun--

School teacher found you?

Took a while, but he ~~did~~. Finally^h.

And he didn't take you back?

O no. I wasn't going back there, I don't care who found who.

Any life, but not that one. I went to jail instead. Denver was just a ~~few~~ months old so she went right along with me. Rats bit every thing in there but her.

Paul turned away. He wanted to know more about it, but jail talk put him back in Alfred, Georgia.

I need some nails. Anybody ^Taround here I can borrow from or should I go to town?

May as well go to town. You'll need other things.

One night and they were talking like a couple. They had skipped ^{love} love and promise and went directly to "You ^{saying} saying it's all right to scramble here.?"

To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past as bay. The "better life" she believed she and Denver were living was simply ^{other} "not that one."

The fact the Paul D. had come out of ^{other} "that one" into her bed, was better too, ; ^{and} but the notion of a future with him, or for that matter without him, ^{was beginning to stroke} ~~never crossed~~ her mind. As for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered.

Carnival will follow

what you need either. I don't want to hear another word out of you."

"I just asked if---"

"Hush! You make tracks. Go somewhere and sit down."

Denver picked up her plate and left the table but not before adding a chicken back and more bread to the heap she was carrying away. Paul D leaned over the spilled coffee with his blue handkerchief.

Chapter 4

Pleasantly troubled, Sethe avoided the keeping room and Denver's sidelong looks. As she expected, since life was like that--it didn't do any good. Denver ran a mighty interference and on the third day flat out asked Paul D how long he was going to hang around.

The phrase hurt him so much he missed the table. The coffee cup hit the floor and rolled down the sloping boards toward the front door.

"Hang around?" Paul D didn't even look at the mess he had made.

"Denver! What's got into you?" Sethe looked at her daughter feeling more embarrassment than anger.

Paul D scratched the hair on his chin. "I guess I need to make tracks."

"No!" Sethe was surprised by how loud she said it.

"He knows what he needs," said Denver.

"Well you don't," Sethe told her, "and you must not know

what you need either. I don't want to hear another word out of you."

"I just asked if---"

"Hush! You make tracks. Go somewhere and sit down."

Denver picked up her plate and left the table but not before adding a chicken back and more bread to the heap she was carrying away. Paul D leaned over to wipe the spilled coffee with his blue handkerchief.

"I'll get that." Sethe jumped up and went to the stove. Behind it various cloths hung, each in some stage of drying. In silence she wiped the floor and retrieved the cup. Then she poured him another cupful, and set it carefully before him. Paul D touched its rim but didn't say anything--as though even "thank you" was an obligation he could not make and the coffee itself a gift he could not take.

Sethe resumed her chair and the silence continued. Finally she realized that if it was going to be broken she would have to do it.

"I didn't train her like that."

Paul D stroked the rim of the cup.

"And I'm as surprised by her manners as you are hurt by em."

Paul D looked at Sethe. "Is there history to her question?"

"History? What you mean?"

"I mean, did she have to ask, or want to ask, that of any body else before me?"

Sethe made two fists and placed them on her hips. "You as bad as she is."

"Come on, ^Sæthe."

"O I am coming on. I am!"

"You know what I mean."

"I do and I don't like it."

"Jesus," he whi^Spered.

"Who?" Sethe was getting loud again.

"Jesus! I said Jesus! All I did was sit down to supper! and I get cussed out twice. Once for being here and once for asking why I was cussed in the first place!"

"She didn't cuss."

"No? Felt like it."

"Look here. I apologize for her. I really---"

"You can't do that. You can't apologize for nobody. She got to do that."

"I'll se^e that she does" Sethe sighed.

"What I want to know isⁱs she asking a question that's on your mind too?"

"O no. No, Paul D. O no."

"Then she's of one mind and you another? If you can call whatever's in her head a mind, that is."

"Excuse me, but I can't hear a word against her. I'll chastise her. You leave her a^done."

"You can't go by that. You got to say it to her. Tell her
when to leave anything to a
her. He was settled on.

Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit, everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croker sack, well maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one. "Why?" he asked her. "Why you think you have to take up for her? Apologize for her. She's grown."

"I don't care what she is. Grown don't mean nothing to a mother. A child is a child. They get bigger, older, but grown? What's that supposed to mean? In my heart it don't mean a thing."

"It means she has to take it if she acts up. You can't protect her every minute. What's going to happen when you die?"

"Nothing! I'll protect her while I'm live and I'll protect her when I ain't!"

"O well I'm through," he said. "I quit."

"That's the way it is Paul D. I can't explain it to you no better than that, but that's the way it is. If I have to choose-- well it's not even a choice."

"That's the point. The whole point. I'm not asking you to choose. Nobody would. I thought--well I thought you could--there was some space for me."

"She's asking me."

"You can't go by that. You got to say it to her. Tell her it's not about choosing somebody over her--it's making space

for somebody along with her. You got to say it. And if you say it and mean it, then you also got to know you can't gag me. There's no way I'm going to hurt her or not take care of what she need if I can, but I can't be told to keep my mouth shut if she's acting ugly. You want me here, don't put no gag on me."

"Maybe I should leave things the way they are," she said.

"How are they?"

"Drylongso. We get along."

"What about inside?"

"I don't go inside."

"Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. I'm not saying this because I need a place to stay. That's the last thing I need. I told you, I'm a walking man, but I been heading in this direction for eighteen years. Walking all around this place. Upstate, down state, East, West; I been in territory aint got no name, never staying nowhere long. But when I got here and sat out there on the porch, waiting for you, well I knew it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you. We can make a life, girl. A life."

"I don't know. I don't know."

"leave it to me. See how it goes. No promises, if you don't want to make any. Just see how it goes. All right?"

"All right."

"You willing to leave it to me?"

"Well--some of it."

"Some," he smiled. "OK. Here's some. There's a carnival in town. Thursday, tomorrow, is for Coloreds and I got two dollars. Me and you and Denver gonna spend every penny of it. What you say?"

"No," is what she said. At least what she started out saying, but even when she said it she was thinking how much her eyes enjoyed looking in his face.

The crickets were screaming on Thursday and the sky, stripped of blue, was white hot at 11:00 in the morning. Sethe was badly dress^{ed} for the heat, but this being her first social outing in years, she felt obliged to wear her one good dress, heavy as it was, and a hat. Certainly a hat. She didn't want to meet Lady Jones or Ella with her head wrapped like she was going to work. Denver and Paul D fared better in the heat since neither felt the occasion required special clothing. Denver's bonnet knocked against her shoulder blades; Paul D wore his vest open, no jacket and his shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows. They were not holding hands, but their shadows were. Sethe looked to her left and all three of them were gliding over the dust holding hands. Maybe he was right. A life. Watching their hand-holding shadows, she

was embarrassed at being dressed for church. The others, ahead and behind them, would ~~think~~^{think} she was putting on airs, letting them know that she was different because she owned a house with two stories; tougher, because she could do and survive things they believed she should neither do nor survive. She was glad Denver has resisted her urgings to dress up- re-braid her hair at least. But Denver was ^{not} doing anything to make this trip a pleasure. She agreed to go--sullenly--but her attitude was "Go head. Try and make my happy." The happy one was Paul D. He said howdy to everybody within twenty feet. Made fun of the weather and what it was doing to him, yelled back AT THE crows, and was the first to smell the doomed roses. All the time, no matter whay they were dong--whether Denver wiped perspiration from her forehead or stooped to re-tie her shoes; whether Paul D kicked a stone or ^{reached} ~~reacher~~ over to meddle a child's face leaning on its mother's shoulder--all the time ^{the} ~~their~~ three shadows that shot out of their feet to the left held hands. Nobody noticed but Sethe and she stopped looking after she decided that it was a good sign. A life. Could be. A real life.

Up and down the lumberyard fence old roses were dying. The sawyer who had planted them twelve years ago to give his work place a friendly feel--something to take the sin out of slicing trees for a living--was amazed by their abundance; how rapidly they crawled all over the stake-and-post fence that separated the lumberyard from the open field next to it where homeless men

slept, children ran and, once a year, carnival people pitched tents. The closer the roses got to death the louder their scent; as though paniced^K by the teeth of annihilation, they wanted to leave the world a strong memory⁽ of what they had been. In fact, they stank, but they were right about memory. Everybody who attended the carnival associated it with the stench of rotten roses. It made them a little dizzy and very thirsty but did nothing to extinguish the eagerness of the Negroes filing down the road. Some walked on the grassy shoulders, others dodged wagons down the road's dusty center. All, like Paul D, ^{were} in high spirits which the smell of dying roses (that Paul D called first to everybody's attention) could not dampen. As they pressed to get to the rope entrance they ^{were} lit like lamps. Breathless with the excitement of seeing white people loose: doing magic, clowning, without heads or with two heads, twenty feet tall or two feet tall, weighing a ton, completely tatooed, eating glass, swallowing fire, spitting ribbons, twisted into knots, forming pyramids, playing with snakes and beating each other up,

All of this was advertised, read by those who could and heard by those who could not, and the fact that none of it was true did not extinguish their appetite a bit. The barker called them and their children names ("Pickaninnies free!") but the food

on his vest and the hole in his pants rendered it fairly harmless. In any case it was a small price to pay for the fun they might not see ever again. Two pennies and an insult was well spent if it meant seeing the spectacle of white folks making a spectacle of themselves. So, although the carnival was a lot less than mediocre (which is why it agreed to a Colored Thursday) it gave ^{the} four hundred Black people in its audience thrill upon thrill upon thrill.

Mrs. One Ton Lady spit at them, but her bulk shortened her aim and they got a big kick out of the helpless meanness in her little eyes. Arabian Nights Dancer cut her performance to three minutes instead of the fifteen she normally did- earning the gratitude of the children who could hardly wait for Abu Snake Charmer who followed her.

Denver bought hoarhound, licorice, peppermint and lemonade at a table manned by a little white girl in ladies high topped shoes. Soothed by sugar, surrounded by a crowd of people who did not find her the main attraction, who, in fact, said "Hey, Denver," every now and then, pleased her enough to consider the possibility that Paul D wasn't all that bad. In fact there was something about him--when the three of them stood together watching Midget dance--that made the stares of other Negroes kind, gentle, something Denver did not remember seeing in their faces. Several even nodded and smiled at her mother, No one, apparently, able to withstand sharing the pleasure Paul D was having. He slapped his knees when Giant danced with Midget; when The Headed Man talked to himself. He brought over the dog Denver asked for and much she did not. He teased Sethe into tents she was reluctant to enter. Stuck pieces of can

Chap 5

when Two Headed Man talked to himself. He bought everything Denver asked for and ~~much~~^g she did not. He teased Sethe into tents she was reluctant to enter. Stuck pieces of candy she didn't want between her lips. When Wild African Savage shook his bars and said wa wa, Paul D told everybody he knew him back in Roanoke.

Paul D made a few acquaintances; spoke to them about what work he might find. Sethe returned ^{the} smiles she got. Denver was swaying with delight. And ~~even~~ on the way home, although following them now, the shadows of three people ^{still} held hands, oblivious of the stinking roses that wanted to leave the world a strong memory of what they had been.

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A fully dressed woman walked out of the water. She barely gained the dry bank of the ~~creek~~ ^{stream} before she sat down and leaned against a mulberry tree. All day and all night she sat there, her head resting on the trunk in a position abandoned enough to crack the brim in her straw hat. Everything hurt but her lungs most of all. Sopping wet and breathing ~~shallow~~ ^{shallow} she spent ^{those} the hours trying to negotiate the weight of her eyelids. The day breeze blew her dress dry; the night wind wrinkled it. Nobody saw her emerge or came accidentally by. If they had, chances are they would have hesitated before approaching her. Not because she was wet, or dozing or had what sounded like asthma, but ^{because} ~~because~~ ^I ~~amid~~ ^{that} all ~~those~~ ^{things}, she ^{was} ~~seemed to be~~ smiling. It took her the whole of the next morning to ^{lift} ~~life~~ herself from the ground and make her way ^{through} ~~across~~ the ^{woods} ~~field~~ ^{field and then the} past a giant temple of boxwood to the ^{yard} of the slate gray house. Exhausted, she ^{again} sat down on the first handy place--a stump near the steps of 124. By then keeping her eyes ~~open~~ open was less of an effort. She could manage it for a full two minutes or more. The difficulty now was holding her head up. Her neck, its circumference no ^{parlor} ~~palor~~ wider than a ~~palor~~-service saucer--kept bending and her

chin brushed the bit of lace edging her dress.

Women who drink champagne when there[#] is nothing to celebrate can look ~~the~~ like that: their straw hats with broken brims are often askew; they nod in public places; their shoes are undone. But ~~then~~ their skin is not like^t that of the woman breathing ^{near} on the steps of 124. She had ~~new~~ new skin, lineless and smooth ~~including~~ including the knuckles of her hands.

By late afternoon when the carnival was over, and the Negroes were hitching rides home if they were lucky--walking if they were not--the woman had fallen asleep again. The rays of the sun struck her full in the face, so that when Sethe, Denver and Paul D. reached the rise in the road, all they saw was a black dress, ^d two unlaced shoes below it and Here Boy no where in sight.

"Look," said Denver.

"What is that?"

"Mighty thirsty look like."

The woman gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four times the woman drank

And for some reason she could never account for, the moment she got close enough to see the face, Sethe's bladder filled to capacity. She said O, excuse me and ran around to the back of 124. Not since she was a baby girl in Georgia, being cared for by the eight year old girl who pointed out her mama to her, had she had an emergency that unmanageable. She never made the out house. Right in front of its door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless. Like a horse, she thought, but as it went on and on she thought no, more like flooding the canoe when Denver was born. So

much water Amy said Hold on, girl. You going to sink us you keep that up. But there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now. She hoped Paul. D. wouldn't take it upon himself to come looking for her and be obliged to see her squatting in front of her own privy making a mudhole too deep to be witnessed without shame. Just about the time she started wondering if the carnival would accept another ^{Freak!} phenomenon, it stopped. She tidied herself and hurried back to the porch steps. No one was there. All three were ^{inside} ~~inside~~--Paul D. and Denver standing before the stranger, watching her drink cup after cup of water.

"Said she was thirsty," said Paul D. He took off his cap.

"Mighty thirsty look like."

The woman gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four [#] times the woman drank

as though she had crossed a desert. When she was finished, she looked at them ~~each~~ one at a time and sighed.

"You from around here?" ~~asked Sethe~~ Sethe asked her.

She shook her head no and reached down to take off her shoes.

So he pulled her dress up to her knees and rolled down her stockings.

When they ^{having} ~~were~~ tucked into the shoes, Sethe saw that her feet were like her hands, soft and new. She must have hitched a wagon ride, thought Sethe. Probably one of those West Virginia girls looking for something to beat a life of tobacco and sorghum.

"What might your name be?" asked Paul D.

"Beloved," she said and her voice was so low and rough each one looked at the other two. They heard the voice first--later the name.

"Beloved. You use a last name, Beloved?" Paul D asked her.

"Last?" She seemed puzzled. Then "No," and she spelled it for them, slowly as though the letters were being formed as she spoke them.

Paul D. smiled. He recognized the careful enunciation of letters by those, like himself, ~~who~~ who could not read but had memorized the letters of their name. He was about to ask ^{who} ~~her~~ her people were but ^{thought} better of it. A young colored woman drifting was drifting from ruins. He had been in Rochester four years ago and seen five women arriving with fourteen female children. All their men (brothers, uncles, father, husbands, sons) had been picked off one by one by one. They had a single

piece of paper directing them to a preacher on DeVore Street. The war had been over a dozen years then, but nobody white or black seemed to know it. Odd clusters and strays of Negroes wandered the back roads and cow-paths from Schenectady to ^{Jackson} Austin. Dazed but insistent, they searched each other out for word of a cousin, an aunt, a friend who once said "Call on me. Anytime you get near Chicago, just call on me." Some of them were running from family that could not support them, some to family; some were running from dead crops, dead kin and took-over land. Boys younger than Buglar and Howard; configurations and blends of families of women and children, and men, men, men. Forbidden public transportation, chased by debt, they followed secondary routes, scanned the horizon for signs and counted heavily on each other. Silent, except for social courtesies, when they met, they neither described nor solicited the sorrow that drove them from one place to another. The whites didn't bear speaking on. Everybody knew.

So ^{the} they did not press the ^{young} woman with the broken hat about where from or how come. If she wanted them to know and was strong enough to get through the telling, she would. What occupied them at the moment was what it might be that she needed. Underneath that major ^{question} concern, each harbored another. Paul D. wondered at the newness of her shoes. Sethe ^{deeply} was touched by her name, the vision of the glittering headstone made her ^{smelt}

feel especially kindly toward her. Denver, however, was shaking. She looked at this sleepy beauty and wanted more.

Sethe hung her hat on a peg and turned graciously toward the girl. "That's real pretty, ^a ^{Name} Beloved. Take off your hat, why don't you, and I'll make ^{us} something. ^{We} just got back from the carnival over in Cincinnati. Everything in there is something to see."

Bolt upright in the chair, in the middle of Sethe's ^{wel-} ^{sel} come, Beloved had fallen asleep again.

"Miss. Miss." Paul D. shook her gently. "You want to lay down a spell?"

She opened her eyes to slits and stood up on her soft new feet which, barely capable of their job, slowly bore her to the keeping room. Once there, she collapsed on Baby Suggs' bed. Denver removed her hat and put the quilt with two squares of color over her feet. She was breathing like a steam engine.

"Sounds like croup," said Paul D. closing the door.

"Is she feverish? Denver, could you tell?"

"No. She's cold."

"Then she is. Fever goes from hot to cold."

"Could have the cholera," said Paul D.

"Reckon?"

"All that water. Sure sign."

"Poor thing. And nothing in this house to give her for it. She'll just have to ride it out. That's a hateful sickness if ever there was one."

"She's not sick!" said Denver and the passion in her voice made them smile.

Four days she slept, waking and sitting up only for water. Denver tended her, watched her sleeping soundly, listened to her labored breathing and, out of love and a breakneck possessiveness that charged her, hid like a personal blemish Beloved's incontinence. secretly she rinsed the sheets, after Sethe went to the restaurant and Paul D. went scrounging for barge's to help unload... She boiled the underwear and soaked it in blueing, praying the fever would pass without damage. So intent was her nursing, she forgot to eat or visit the emerald closet.

"Beloved?" Denver ^{would} whispered. "Beloved?" and when the black eyes opened a slice all she could say was "I'm here. I'm still here."

Sometimes, when Beloved lay dreamy-eyed for a ^{very} long time, saying nothing, licking her lips and heaving deep sighs, Denver panicked. "What is it?" she would ask.

"Heavy," murmured Beloved. "Everything is so heavy."

"Would you like to sit up?"

No," said the raspy voice. "I'll get used to it."

^{It took} After three days ^{for Beloved to} she noticed the orange patches in the darkness of the quilt. Denver was pleased because it kept her patient awake longer. ^{she} Beloved seemed totally taken with those faded scraps of orange. Even made the effort to lean on her elbow and stroke them. An effort that quickly exhausted her, so Denver rearranged the quilt so its cheeriest part was in Beloved's sight line. ^{the sick girl's.}

Patience, something Denver had never known, ^N overtook her. ^{It} As long as her mother did not interfere, she was a model of compassion, turning waspish, though, when Sethe tried to help.

"Did she take a spoonful of anything today?" Sethe inquired.

"She shouldn't eat with cholera."

"You sure that's it? Was just a hunch of Paul D's"

"I don't know, but she shouldn't eat anyway just yet."

"I think cholera people puke all the time."

"That's even more reason, ain't it?"

"Well, she shouldn't starve to death either, Denver."

"Leave us alone, ^{Mama} ~~Mama~~. I'm taking care of her."

"She say anything?"

"I'd let you know if she did."

Sethe looked at her daughter and thought, yes, she has been

lonesome
~~lonely~~. *lonesome,*
Very ~~lonely~~.

"Wonder where Here Boy got off of?" Sethe thought a change of subject was needed.

"He won't be back," said Denver.

"how you know?"

"I just know. " Denver took a square of sweet bread off the plate.

Back in the keeping room, Denver was about to sit down when Beloved's eyes flew wide open, ~~every trace of sleep gone~~.

Denver felt her heart race. It wasn't that she was looking at that face for the first time with no trace of sleep in it, Nor was it ~~that~~ of them or that the eyes were big and black. ~~It was~~ that the whites were much too white--blue-white. It was that deep ^{down in} ~~within~~ those big black eyes, there was no expression at all.

"Can I get you something?"

Beloved looked at the sweet bread in Denver's hand and Denver held it out to her. ^{that did appear} ~~The expression on her face as she tasted it~~ went from ~~pleasure to ecstasy~~. She smiled then and in the glitter

of it Denver's heart stopped bouncing and sat down--releived
and easeful like ^a traveler who had made it home.

From that moment and through everything that followed, sugar could always be counted on to please her. It was as though sweet things were what she was born for. Honey as well as the wax it came in, sugar sandwiches, the sludgy molasses gone hard and brutal in the can, lemonade, taffy, ^{and} any type of dessert Sethe brought home from the restaurant. She gnawed a cane stick to flax and kept the strings in her mouth long after the syrup had been sucked away. Denver laughed, Sethe smiled and Paul D, said it made him sick to his stomach.

Sethe believed it was a recovering body's need--after an illness-- for quick strength. But it was a need that went on and on into glowing health because Beloved didn't go anywhere. There didn't seem any place for her to go. She didn't mention one, or have much of an idea of what she was doing in that part of the country or where she had been. They believed the fever caused her memory to fail just as it kept her slow moving. For a young woman, in her mid-twenties about, and slender, she moved like a heavy one or an older one. Holding on to furniture, resting her head in the palm of her hand as though it was too heavy for her ^a neck alone.

"You just gonna feed her? From now on?" Paul D, feeling ungenerous, and surprised by it, heard the irritability in his voice.

"Denver likes her. She's no real trouble. I thought we'd wait ^{till} her breath was better. She still sounds a little lumbar to me."

"Something funny bout that gal, " Paul said, mostly to himself.

"Funny how?"

"Acts sick, sound sic^k, but she don't look sick. Good skin, bright eyes and str^ong as a bull."

" She's not strong. She can't hardly walk without holding on to something"

"That's what I mean. Can't walk, but I seen her pick up the bed with one hand."

"You didn't."

"Don't tell me."

"She couldn't have."

Ask Denver. She was right there with here^l..:

"Denver! Come here a minute.""

woman's return.

TK
Setha was flattered by Beloved's quiet, open devotion. The same devotion from her daughter (had it been forthcoming) would have annoyed her; made her chill at the thought of having raised a ridiculously dependent child. But the company of this sweet, if peculiar, guest pleased her the way a scold pleases his teacher.

Time came when lamps had to be lit ^{early} earlier because night arrived sooner and sooner. Setha was leaving ^{for} work in the dark; Paul D. was waiting home for work in it. Setha ~~had~~ cut a rutabaga into ~~few~~ ^{small} slices and left them stewing. She gave Denver a half peck of peas to sort and soak overnight. Then she set herself down to rest. The heat of the stove made her drowsy... and she was sliding into sleep when she felt Beloved touch her. A kiss touch no heavier than a feather but loaded, nevertheless, with desire. Setha stirred and looked around. First at Beloved's soft face

Red Book (over)

Rain water held on to pine needles for dear life and Beloved could not take her ^eeyes off Sethe. Stooping to shake the damper, or snapping sticks for kindling, Sethe was licked, tasted eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required and told to. She rose early in the dark to be there, waiting, in the kitchen when Sethe came down to make fast bread before she left for work. In lamplight, and over the flames of the cooking stove, their two shadows clashed and crossed ^s on the ceiling like black swords. She was in the window at 2:00 when Sethe returned, or the doorway; then the porch, its steps, the path, the road, till finally, surrendering to the habit, Beloved began inching down Bluestone Road further and further each day to meet Sethe and walk her back to 124. It was as though every afternoon, she doubted anew the older woman's return.

Sethe was flattered by Beloved's quiet, open devotion. The same adoration from her daughter (had it been forthcoming) would have annoyed her; made her chill at the thought of having raised a ridiculously dependent child. But the company of this sweet, if peculiar, guest pleased her the way a zealot pleases his teacher.

Time came when lamps had to be lit ^{early} earlier because night arrived sooner and sooner. Sethe was leaving ^{for} work in the dark; Paul D. was walking home ~~from work~~ in it. ^{Bad Porch (over)} Sethe ~~had~~ cut a rutabega into four pieces and left them stewing. She gave Denver a half peck of peas to sort and soak overnight. Then she sat herself down to rest. The heat of the stove made her drowsy...and she was sliding into sleep when she felt Beloved touch her ^f A ~~xxx~~ touch no heavier than a feather but loaded, nevertheless, with desire. Sethe stirred and looked around. First at Beloved's soft new

~~kh~~hand

hand on her shoulder, then into her eyes. The longing she saw there was bottomless. Some plea barely in control. Sethe patted Beloved's fingers and glanced at Denver whose eyes were fixed on her peas-sorting task/

"Do you have diamonds?" Beloved searched Sethe's face

"Diamonds? What would I be doing with diamonds?"

"I just thought you had some."

"Wish I did. I had some crystal once. A present from a lady I worked for."

"Tell me," said Beloved smiling ^a ~~her~~ wide happy smile. "Tell me about your earrings."

It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sugar things had on Beloved, ^{so} Sethe learned the profound ~~st~~ ^{sa}isfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe as much as it pleased Beloved because for twenty-five years every mention of her ² ~~ps~~t life hurt. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable; to Denver's inquiries Sethe gave short replies or rambling incomplete reveries. Even with Paul D., who had shared some of it and to whom she could talk with at least a measure of calm, the hurt was always there--^{like} a tender place in the corner of her mouth that the bit left.

But as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved's distance from the events itself, or her ~~th~~ thirst for hearing it-- in any case it was an unexpected pleasure.

Above the patter of the pea-sorting, and the sharp odor of cooking rutabaga, Sethe explained the crystal that once hung from her ears.

"The lady I worked for in Kentucky gave them to me when I got married. What they called married back there and back then. I guess she saw how bad I felt when I found out there wasn't going to be no ceremony, no preacher. Nothing. I thought there should be something. Something to say it was right and true. I didn't want it to be just me moving over a bit on a pallet full of corn husks. Or just me bringing my night bucket into his cabin. I thought there should be some ceremony. Dancing maybe. A little sweet william." ^{in my hair} Sethe smiled. "I never saw a wedding, but I saw Mrs. Garner's wedding gown in her press, and heard her go on about what all it was like. Two pounds of currants in the cake, she said and four whole sheep. The people were still eating the next day. That's what I wanted. A meal maybe, where me and Halle and all the Sweet Home men sat down and ate something special. Invite some of the other colored people from over at ----- and ----- . But it wasn't going to be ^{nothing} ~~anything~~. They said it was all right for us to be husband and wife and that was it. All of it. Well, I made up my mind to have at the least a dress that wasn't the sacking I worked in. So I took to stealing fabric, and wound up with a dress you wouldn't believe. The top was from two pillow cases in her mending basket. The front of the skirt was a dresser scarf a candle fell on and burnt a hole in, and one of her old sashes we used to test the flat iron on, ^{no}

Now the back was a problem for the longest time. Seem like I couldn't find a thing that wouldn't be missed right away. Because

I had to take it ^aaprt afterwards and put all the pieces back ^{where} ~~where~~ they were. ^{Now} Halle was patient, waiting for me to finish it. He knew I wouldn't go ahead without having it. Finally I took the mosquito netting from a nail out the ~~the~~ barn. ~~We~~ ^{it} used it to strain jelly through. I washed and soaked it best I ^ocould and tacked it on for the back of the skⁱrt. And there I was, in the worst looking gown you could imagine. Only ~~the~~ ^{my} woollen shawl kept me from looking like a haint peddling. I wasn't but four^{teen} years old, so I reckon that's why I was so ^{Proud} ~~proud~~ of myself. Anyhow, Mrs. Garner must have seen me in it. Going down to the cornfield with Halle. That's where we went first. A saturday aftern^{oon} it was. He begged sick so he wouldn't have to go work in town that day. Usually he worked Saturdays and Sundays to pay off his ^{Baby Suggs} ~~mama's~~ freedom. But he begged sick and I put on my dress and we ~~I~~ walked into the corn holding hands. I ^{can still} ~~could~~ smell ^{the} ears roasting ^{up yonder} ~~on the knoll~~ where the Pauls and Sixo was. Next day Mrs. Garner crooked her finger at me and took me upstairs to her bedroom. She opened up a wooden box and took out a pair of crystal earrings. She said 'I want yuou to have ~~xxe~~ these, Sethe.' I ~~s~~ad Yes, Maam. 'Are you ^{ears} pierced?' she said. I said 'No maam' "Well do it," she ~~s~~ad 'so you can wear them. I want you to have them and I want you and Halle to be happy.' I thanked her but I never did ^{put them on} ~~did~~ till I got away from there. ^{One} ~~Two~~ days ^{and} after I walked into this here house ^{Baby Suggs} unknotted my underskirt, took em out. I sat right here by the stove with Denver in my arms and let ^{her} ~~Baby Suggs~~ punch holes in my ears for to wear them."

"I never saw you in no ~~ax~~ earrings," said Denver. "

"Where are they now?"

"Gone," ~~s~~aid Sethe. "Long gone.," and she wouldn't say another word more. Until the next time when all three of them ran through the wind back into the house with rain soaked sheets and petticoats. Panting, laughing, they draped the laundry over chairs and tables. Beloved filled herself with water from the bucket and watched while Sethe rubbed Denver's hair with a piece of ~~cotton~~ ^{towel}.

"Maybe we should unbraided it." asked Sethe

"Uh Uh. Tomorrow," Denver ~~sat~~ crouched forward at the thought of a fine tooth comb pulling her hair.

"Today is always here," said Sethe. "Tomorrow, never."

"It hurts." Denver said.

"Comb it every day, it won't."

"Ouch."

"Your ^{ma'am} ~~mama~~ never ever fix over your hair?" Beloved ^{asked} said.

Sethe and Denver looked up at her. After two weeks they still had not got used to the gravelly voice and the song that seemed to lie in it. Just outside music it lay ~~as a result of~~ ^{with a} the cadence not ^{like theirs.} ~~their own.~~

"Did your ^{ma'am} ~~mama~~ never ever fix over your hair," was clearly a question for Sethe, since that's ^{who} ~~whom~~ she was looking at, but it had no inflection at the end. It sounded like a fact.

"If she did, I don't remember. I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she ^{Slept} ~~slept~~

like a ¹stock. She must of nursed me two or three weeks--
that's they way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I
sucked from another woman whose job it was. So to answer you,
No. I reckon not. She never fixed my hair nor nothing.
She didn't even sleep in the same cabin most nights I remember.
Too far from the line up I guess. ^{TK} ~~But~~ ^{one} thing she did ~~do~~,
She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back
there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and
pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross
burnt right in the skin. ^{She said} "This is your mammy. ^{she said} This," and she
pointed, . 'I am the only one with this mark now. ~~All~~ the
rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me
by my face you can know me by this mark.'" Scared me so. All
I could think of was how important this was and how I needed
to have something important to say back, but I couldn't think
of anything so I just said what I thought. 'Yes mam,' I said,
'But ~~how~~ ^{How will you know me?} will you know me? Mark me, too,' I said. "Make the
mark on me too." "Sethe chuckled

"Did she?" asked Beloved.

~~No~~. She slapped my face."

"What for?"

"I didn't understand it then. Not til I had a mark of my
own."

"What happend to her?"

"Hung. By the time they cut her down nobody could tell
whether she had a circle and a cross ^{or} of not. Least of all me and
I did look." Sethe gathered hair from the comb and leaning back

7 (Break
with
gestures
of what
they are
doing)

red
tossed it into the fire. It exploded ^{into stars} ~~like spores~~ and the smell infuriated them. "Oh, my Jesus" she said and stood up so suddenly the comb she had parked in Denver's hair fell to the floor."

^{Ma'am?}
"What 's the matter with you, ^{ma'am} ~~mama~~?"
¹ Sethe ~~shook her head~~, ^{walked over to a chair,} lifted a sheet ~~from the back of a~~

~~chair~~ and stretched it as wide as her arms would go. Then she folded, re-folded and double folded it. She took another. Neither was completely dry but the folding felt too fine to stop. She had to do something with her hands because she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross.

^{they} "Why ~~that~~ hang you ^{mother} ~~mama~~?" Beloved asked

^{found out.} "I never ~~knew~~. It was a lot of them," she said, but

^{mam.} what was getting clear and clearer as she folded and re-folded damp laundry was the woman called Nan who took her hand and yanked her away from the pile before she could make out the mark. Nan was the one she knew best, who was around all day, who nursed babies, cooked, had one good arm and half of another. And who used different words. Words Sethe understood then but ~~not now~~. ~~She~~ could neither recall or repeat ^{NOW} ~~them~~. She believed that must be why she never remembered anything before Sweet Home except ^{she told it in and} how crowded it was.. What Nan told her she had forgotten along with the language which would never come back, but the message-- that was and had been there all along. Holding the damp white

^{Singsongs & dancing!}

sheets against her chest, she was picking meaning out of a code she no longer understood. Night time. Nan holding her with her good arm, waving the stump of the other in the air. "Telling you, I am telling, ^{you} small girl Sethe" and she did that. ~~She told~~
~~Sethe that many mothers and daughters were together from the sea. Both w~~
She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken ^{up} many times ~~on deck to~~ be laid down on by the crew. "She threw them all away but you. ~~You she let~~
~~live.~~ The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more ~~white~~ white ^s men she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. YOu she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe."

As small girl Sethe, she was unimpressed. As grown up woman Sethe she was angry, but not certain of what. A mighty wish for Baby Suggs broke over her like surf. In the quiet following its ^{splash}, Sethe looked at the ^{two girls sitting} ~~women~~ by the stove: her sickly, ^{shallow} minded boarder, her irritable, lon^ely daughter. Both on the other side of the cliff of time looking back at her with cold moon eyes she could not reach.

"Paul D. be here in a minute," she said.

Denver sighed with relif^e., happy the story-telling was over. For a minute there, while her mother stood folding the wash lost in thought, she clamped her teeth ^{and prayed} ~~praying~~ it would stop. Denver hated the stories her mother told that ^{did} not concern herself, which is why ~~Amy~~ was all she ever asked her about. The rest was

a gleaming powerful world made more gleaming by Denver's absence
from it. Not being in it, she hated it and wanted Beloved to
hate it too, although there was no chance of that ^{at all} whatsoever.
Beloved took every opportunity to ask some funny question
and get Sethe going. Denver noticed how greedy ^{she} Beloved was
to hear Sethe talk. Now she noticed something more. The ques-
tion^s Beloved asked. Do you have diamonds? Did you¹ Mama¹ never
ever fix^{over} your hair? And most perplexing "Tell me about your
earrings."

How did she know?"

Beloved was shining and Paul D didn't like it. Women
did what strawberry plants did before they shot out their
thin vines! The quality of the green changed. Then the
vine threads came, then the buds. By the time the white
petals had died and the mint-colored berry poked out, the
leaf-shine was gilded tight and waxy. That's how Beloved
looked--gilded and shining. Paul D took to having sex with
Sethe on waxing so that later, when he went down the white
stairs where she made bread under Beloved's gaze, his head
was clear.

In the evening when he came home and the three of them
were all there fixing the supper table, her shine was so
pronounced he wondered why Denver and Sethe didn't see it.
Or maybe they did. Certainly women could tell, as men could,
when one of their number was spraying. Paul D looked care-

fully at Beloved to see if she was aware of it herself, but she paid him no attention at all--frequently not even answering a direct question put to her. She would just look and not open her mouth. Three weeks she had been with them, and they didn't know any more about her than they did when they found her asleep on the stump.

Chapter 6

are seated at the table Paul D had broken the day he arrived at 124. Its mended legs were stronger than before. The cabbage was all gone and the shiny ankle bones of smoked pork were pushed in a heap on their plates. Sethe was dishing

Beloved was shining and Paul D didn't like it. Women did what strawberry plants did before they shot out their loved's thin vines: The quality of the green changed. Then the vine threads came, then the buds. By the time the white petals had died and the mint-colored berry poked out, the leaf-shine was gilded tight and waxy. That's how Beloved looked--gilded and shining. Paul D took to having sex with Sethe on waking so that later, when he went down the white stairs where she made bread under Beloved's gaze, his head was clear. you come? who brought you?"

In the evening when he came home and the three of them were all there fixing the supper table, her shine was so pronounced he wondered why Denver and Sethe didn't see it. Or maybe they did. Certainly women could tell, as men could, when one of their number was spraying. Paul D looked care-

fully at Beloved to see if she was ~~AWARE OF IT HERSELF~~, but she paid him no attention at all--frequently not even answering a direct question put to her. She would just look and not open her mouth. Three weeks she had been with them, and they didn't know any more about her than they did when they found her asleep on the stump.

They were seated at the table Paul D had broken the day he arrived at 124. Its mended legs ~~were~~ stronger than before. The cabbage was all gone and the shiny ankle bones of smoked pork were pushed in a heap on their plates. Sethe was dishing up bread pudding, murmuring her hopes for it, apologizing in advance the way veteran cooks always do, ^{what} something in Beloved's face, some pet-like adoration that took hold of her as she looked at Sethe, made Paul D speak.

"Ain't you got ~~no~~ brothers or sisters?"

Beloved ^{didn't} ~~addled~~ her spoon but did not look at him. "I don't have nobody," she said.

"What was you looking for when you came here?" he asked her.

"A place I could stay in."

"How'd you come? Who brought you?"

Now she looked steadily at him, but did not answer.

He could feel both Sethe and Denver pulling in, holding their stomach muscles, sending out sticky spider webs to touch one another. He decided to force it anyway.

"I said who brought you here?"

"I walked to get here," she said. "A long, long, long, long way. Nobody brought me. Nobody helped me."

"You had new shoes. If you walked so long why don't your shoes show it?"

"Paul D stop picking on her," Sethe frowned.

"I want to know," he said holding the knife handled in his fist like a pole.

Beloved sighed. "I don't know how to tie the strings," She looked embarrassed and gave (or tried to) the impression that that was a satisfactory explanation.

"I'll teach you," said Denver and got a smile from Beloved as a reward.

Paul D had the feeling a large goldfish had slipped from his hands the minute he grabbed hold of its tail. That it was streaming back ^{off} ~~down~~ ^{dark} into water now, gone but for the glisten marking its route. But if her shining was not for him, who then? He had never known a woman who lit up for nobody in particular, who just did it as an announcement. Always, in his experience, the light appeared when there was focus. Like the 30 - Mile woman, dulled to smoke while he waited with her in the ditch, and star-light when Sixo got back. He never knew himself to mistake it. It was there the instant he looked at Sethe's wet legs, otherwise he never would have been bold enough to enclose her in his arms that day and whisper into her back.

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people he had run into during the last twenty-five years. During and after the war he had seen Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft, it was a wonder they recalled or said anything. Who, like him, had hidden in caves and fought owls for food; who, like him, stole from pigs; who like him, slept in trees in the day and walked by night; who, like him, had buried themselves in ^{stop} and jumped in wells to avoid regulators, raiders, paterolers, veterans, hill men, posses, and merry makers. Once he met a Negro about fourteen ^{years old} ~~it seemed~~, who lived ^{by himself} in the woods and said he couldn't remember living anywhere else. He ^{saw} ~~knew~~ a witless colored woman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her own babies.

Move. Walk. Run. Hide. Steal and move on. Only in the last seven or eight years had it been possible to stay in one spot--with a woman, or a family for longer than ^a ~~three or four~~ months. The longest was eighteen months with a weaver lady in Delaware, the meanest place for Negroes he had ever seen outside Pulaski County Kentucky, and of course the prison camp in Georgia.

^{From} ~~Or~~ all those Negroes, Beloved was different. Her shining, new shoes. It bothered him. ^{Or} ~~Maybe~~ it was just the fact that he didn't bother her. ^{it could be} Or her timing. She had appeared and been taken in on the very day Sethe and he had patched up their quarrel, gone out in public and had a right good time--like a family. Denver had come around, so to speak; Sethe was laughing; he had work, 124 was cleared up from spirits. It had begun to look like a life. And damn! a water-drinking woman fell sick on the porch, got

took in, ~~and~~ healed, and hadn't moved a peg since.

He wanted her out, but Sethe had let her in and he couldn't put her out of a house that wasn't his. It was one thing to beat ~~X~~ [#] up a ghost; quite another to throw a helpless colored girl out in territory that claimed as a signal honor the founding of the Kāln.

Sitting at table, chewing on his after=supper broom straw, Paul D. decided to place her. Consult with the Negroes in town and find her her own place.

No sooner ~~had~~ ^{did} he ~~had~~ ^{have} the thought, than Beloved strangled on one of the raisens she had picked out of the bread pudding. She fell backwards ~~and~~ off the chair and thrashed around holding her throat. Sethe, iron-eyed as ~~w~~ always in any emergency, ~~pried~~ her hands away from her neck while Denver knocked her on the back. Beloved, on her hands and knees, vomited up her food and struggled for breath.

When she was quiet and Denver had wiped ^{up} of the mess, she said "I want to sleep now."

"Come in my room," said Denver. "I can watch out for you ~~better~~ up there."

No moment could have been better. Denver had worried herself ~~sick~~ sick trying to think of a way to get Beloved to share her room. It was ~~too~~ ^{so} hard sleeping above her, wondering if she was going to be sick again, fall asleep and not wake ^{OR} of (God, please don't) get up and ^a wander out the ~~xxxxxx~~ yard just the way she wandered in. They could have their talks easier there: at night when Sethe and Paul D. were asleep; or in the daytime before either came home. Sweet, crazy conversation full of

check
(Indiana
1864-
part of
Ohio
territory)

half sentence^s, day dreams, ^{and} misunderstandings more ~~exciting~~ ^{thrilling} than understanding could ever be.

X X X [TK]

"What is it about her vex you so?"

Paul D. frowned, *but said nothing.*

"We had one good fight about Denver. Do we need one about her too?" asked Sethe.

"I just don't underst~~and~~ what the hold is. It's clear why she holds on to you, but I just can't see why you holding on to her)." *]*

Sethe turned away from the sink toward him. "What you care who's holding on to who? Feeding her is no trouble. I pick up a little extra from the restaurant is all. And she's nice girl company for Denver. You know that and I know you know it, so what is it got your teeth on edge?"

~~"I admit~~ I can't place it. It's ^{just} ~~just~~ a feeling. *I got*"

"Well feel this, why don't you. Feel how it feels to have a bed to sleep in and somebody there not worrying you to death about what you got to do each day to deserve it. Feel how that feels. And if that don't get it, feel how it feels to be a colored woman roaming the roads with anything God made liable to jump up on you. Feel that."

"I know every bit of that, Sethe. I wasn't born yesterday and I never mistreated a woman in my life."

"That makes one in the world," Sethe answer^ed.

"Not two?"

"No. NO^t two."

"What Halle ever do to you? Halle stood by you. He never left you."

"What'd he leave then if not me?"

"I don't know, but it wasn't y^ou. That's a fact."

"Then he did worse, he left his children."

"You don't k^Now that."

"He wasn't there. He wasn't where he said ~~he~~^{he} would be."

"He was there."

"Then why didn't he show himself? Why did I have to pack my babies off and stay behind to look for him?"

"He couldn't get out the loft."

"Loft? What loft?"

"The one over your head. In the barn^e."

...^{SINK} Slowly, slowly, taking all the time allowed, Sethe turned from the

"He saw?"

"He saw."

"He told you?"

"You told me."

"What?"

"The day I came in here. YOU said they stole your milk. I never knew what it was that messed him up. That was it, I guess.

All I knew was that something broke ^Phim. ~~Not a one of them~~ ~~Not those~~ years of

Saturday^S, Sunday and nighttime extra never touched him. But

whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him like a twig."

"He saw?" Sethe was gripping her ^Pfingertips ^{elbows} as though ^Tto ~~keep~~ keep them from flying away.

"He saw. Must have."

"He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He ~~saw~~? He Saw?"

"Hey! Hey! Listen up. Let me tell you something. A man ain't a goddam ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddam minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can't ~~cop~~ chop down because they're inside."

Sethe was pacing ^{up} and down, up and down in the lamplight. "The agent said Sunday. They took my milk Saturday and he saw it and didn't come on Sunday. Sunday came ~~he~~ and he didn't. I thought ~~he~~ was dead that's why; then I thought they caught him, that's why. Then I thought No, he's not dead because if he was I'd ~~know~~ know it, and then you come here after all this time and you didn't ~~say~~ ^{say} he was dead, because you didn't know either, so I thought, well, he just found him another better way to live. Because ~~he~~ if he was anywhere near here, he'd come to Baby Suggs, if not to me. But I never knew he saw."

"What does that matter now?"

"If he is alive, and saw that, then he's never coming back."

"It ~~broken, broke~~ broke him. Sethe," Paul D. looked up at her.

"You may as well know. Last time I saw him he was sitting by the churn. He had butter all over his face."

...

"What did ~~you~~ ^{he} say ~~to him?~~?"

"Nothing."

"Not a word?"

"Not a wor^did."

Did you speak to him?

"~~Why~~ didn't you say something to him? Something!"

"I couldn't, Sethe. I just...couldn't."

"Why!"

"I had a bit in my mouth."

2 ll #

Disgusted by her brains, Sethe opened the screen door and sat down on the porch steps. Why was there nothing ~~they~~ refused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture too rotten for her greedy brains to accept? There was no limit to ^{their} appetite. Like a gluttonous child (old woman?) it snatched everything, shoved everything into its ^{lip-smacking} spongy blubber. Just once, could ^{they} it say no thank you? I just ate and can't hold another bite? I am full god damn it of two boys with mossy teeth one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading uncle watching and writing ^{it down.} in a ~~note book~~. I am still full of that, god damn it, I can't go back and add more to it. Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft--hiding close by--the one place he thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I could ^{not} look at at all. And not stopping them--looking and letting it happen. But my greedy brains say oh thanks, we'd love more--so I do go back and add more. And no sooner than I do, there is no stopping. There is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind. And as far as he is concerned, the world may as well know it. And if he was that broken then, ^{he} he is also and certainly dead now. And if Paul D. saw him and could not save or comfort him because the iron bit had been put in his mouth, then there is still more that Paul D. could tell me and my brains would go right head and take it and not say no thank you.

make
all
plural
(Brains)

1009 I don't want to know or remember that. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow, about Denver, about Beloved, about age and illness not ^{to} speak of love.

^{But} still, her brains, loaded with the past and hungry for more left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day. Exactly like that afternoon in the wild onions--when one more step was the most she could ^{see} ~~imagine~~ of the future. Other ~~pe~~^{pe}ople went crazy, why couldn't she? Other people's brains stopped, turned around and went on to something new, which is what must have happened to Halle. And how sweet that would have been: the two of them back by the ice shed, squatting by the churn, smashing cold, lumpy butter into their faces with no ^t another thought in the world. Feeling it slippery, sticky--rubbing it in their hair, watching it squooze through their fingers. What a relief to stop it right there. Close. Shut. Squeeze the butter, ⁼ but her three children were chewing sugar teat under a blanket on their way to Ohio and no butter play would change that.

Paul D. stepped through the door and touched her shoulder.

"I didn't plan on telling you that," he said.

"I didn't plan on hearing it."

"I can't take it back, but I can leave it alone." Paul D. said.

He want^s to tell me, she thought. He wants me to ask him about what it was like for him--about how offended the tongue is held down by iron, how the need to spit is so deep you cry for it. She already ^e know it, had seen it a hundred times in the place before Sweet Home. Men, boys, little girls, women. The wildness ~~of~~ that shot up into the eye the moment the lips were yanked back. Days after~~x~~ it was taken out, goose fat was rubbed on the corners of the mouth but nothing to soothe the tongue or take the wildness out of the eye.

Sethe looked up into Paul D.'s eyes to see if there was any trace ~~of it~~ left in his. ~~She saw none.~~

"People I saw as a child," she said, "who'd had the bit always looked wild after that. Whatever they used it on them for, it couldn't have worked because it put a wildness where before there wasn't any. When I look at you, I don't see it. There aint no wildness in your eye no where."

"There's a way to put it there and ~~there's~~ a way to take it out. I know 'em both and I haven't figured out yet which is worse." He sat down beside her.

"You want to tell me about it?" *she asked him.*

"I don't know. I never have talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes, but I never told a soul."

"Go ahead and tell me. I can hear ~~it~~ it."

"Maybe. Maybe you can hear it. I just ain't sure I can say it. Say it right I mean because it wasn't the bit--that wasn't it."

"What was it?" Sethe asked ~~him~~.

"The roosters. *he said* Walking past the roosters looking at them look at me."

Sethe smiled. "In that pine?"

"Yeah." Paul D. smiled with her. "Must have been five of them perched up there and at least fifty hens."

"Mister, too?"

"Not right off. But I hadn't took twenty steps before I seen him. He come down off the fence post there and sat on the ~~top~~ ^{tub}."

"He loved that tub," said Sethe, thinking no, there is no stopping now.

Paul D. had only begun, what he was telling her was only the
"Didn't he? Like a throne. Was me took him out the shell,
you know. He'da died if it hadn't been for me. The hen had walked
on off with all the hatched trailing behind her. There was this
one egg left. Looked like a blank, but then I saw it move so I
tapped it open and here come Mister, bad feet and all. I watchd
that son a bitch grow up and ^{whup} whip everything in the yard."

"He ~~was~~ always was hateful." ^{Seth said}

"Yeah he was hateful all right. Bloody ^{too and} Evil. Cr⁽ooked feet
flapping. Comb as big as my hand and some kind a red.. He sat
right there on the tub. ^{looking at me. I swear he smiled.} My head was full of what I'd seen of Halle a
while back. I wasn't even thinking about the bit. Just Halle and be-
for him Sixo, but when I saw Mister I knew it was mee ^{too}. Not just
them, me too. One ^{crossed} crazy, two ^{sold} shot, one ^{burnt} hanged and me licking iron
with my hands behind me. The last of the Sweet Home men.

"Mister ^{he} looked so...free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher.
Son a bitch could ⁽idn't even get out the shell by his self but he was
still king and I was..." Paul D. stopped and squeezed his left
hand with his right. He held it th^at way long enough for it and the
world to quiet down and let him go on.

"Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't
allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him and ate
him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way
I'd ever be Paul D. again, living or dead. School teacher changed
me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken
sitting in the sun on a tub."

Sethe put her hand on his ^{ew} knee and rubbed. No. No limit and why
should there be?

Paul D. had only begun , what he was telling her was only the
beginning when her fingers on his knee^s, soft and reassuring, stopped
him. Just as well. Just as well. Saying more might push them
both. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco
tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted
shut. He ~~wanted~~^{would} not pry it loose now in front of this sweet sturdy
woman for if she got a glimpse (whiff) of the contents it would
shame him. And it would hurt her to know that there was no red heart
bright as Mister's comb beating in him.

Sethe rubbed and rubbed, pressing the work cloth and the stoney
curves that made up his knee. She hoped it calmed him as it did her.
Like kneading bread in the half-light of the restaurant kitchen.
Before the ~~chef~~^{cook} arrived when she stood in a space no wider than a
bench is long, back behind the and to the left of the milk
cans . Working dough. Working, working dough. Nothing better
to start the day's serious work of beating back the past.

2 u #

~~Upstairs~~ Beloved was dancing. A little two-step, two-step, make-a-new-step, slide, slide and strut on down.

Denver sat on the bed smiling and providing the music.

"Come on, you too," said Beloved.

"I can't."

"WHY?"

"Watching you is better than doing it."

"Watching ^{can't} is never better. Come on, girl."

Denver had never seen Beloved this happy. She had seen her pouty lips open wide with the pleasure of sugar or some ~~peice~~ of news Denver gave her, like ^{TK}

She had felt ^{warm} ~~deep~~ satisfaction radiating from Beloved's skin when she listened to her mother talk about the ~~olden~~ days. But gaiety she had never seen. Not ten minutes had passed since Beloved had fallen backward to the floor, pop-eyed, thrashing and holding her throat. Now, after a few seconds lying in Denver's bed, she was up and dancing.

"Where'd you learn to dance?" Denver asked her.

"Nowhere. Look at this." Beloved put her fists on her hips and commenced to ~~skip~~ on bare feet. Denver laughed.

"Come on. Come on," said Beloved. "You may as well just come on." Her black skirt swayed from side to side.

Denver grew ice cold as she rose from the bed. She knew she was twice Beloved's size but she floated up, cold and light as a snowflake.

Beloved took Denver's hand and placed another on Denver's shoulder. They danced then. Round and round the tiny room and it may

have been dizziness, or feeling light and icy at once that made Denver laugh so hard. A catching laugh that Beloved caught. The two of them, merry as kittens, swung to and fro, to and fro, until exhausted, they sat on the floor. Beloved let her head fall back on the edge of the bed while she found her breath and Denver saw the tip of the thing she always saw in its entirety when Beloved undressed to sleep. Looking straight at it she whispered "Why did you come here?"

"Diamonds," said Beloved. "I want to know diamonds. And sweet things."

"We have sweet things, but we don't have no diamonds."

"There must be some somewhere."

"Why you want diamonds?"

"To touch. I almost did once."

"What stopped you?"

"I don't know. I got lost. I was lost a long time."

"Where's your people?"

Beloved turned her head and fastened black empty eyes on Denver.

"You and Sethe the only people I ~~ik~~ know. I don't remember ^{no} anybody else."

"Something real bad must have happened to you if you forgot everybody but us."

"Real bad. Yes. It was real bad."

"Do you remember it?"

"I remember it. But nothing before. Except diamonds. I was almost touching diamonds."

"If you touch them will you leave us?"

"No. Never. I'm never going to leave this place. This

is where I ~~we~~ always been."

Denver was sitting cross-legged. Suddenly she lurched forward and grabbed Beloved's wrist. "Don't tell her. Don't let Mama know, Please, you hear?"

"Don't tell me what to do. Don't you never never tell me what to do!"

"But I'm on your side, Beloved.."

"She is the one. She is the one I need. I will let you stay but she is the one I have to have." Her eyes stretched to the limit, black as the all night sky [~~but starless with no hint of a moon~~]

"I didn't do anything to you. I never hurt you. I never hurt anybody," said Denver.

"Me neither. Me either."

"What you gonna do?"

"Stay here. Live here. Where I belong."

"I belong here too."

"I said you could stay, but don't never tell me what to do. Don't never do that."

"We were dancing. Just a minute ago we were dancing together. Let's ~~do it some more~~."

"I don't want to." Beloved ^{got up and} lay down on the bed. Their quietness boomed about on the walls like birds in panic. Finally Denver's breath steadied ^{against} the threat of lost diamonds.

f {
"Tell me," ^{Beloved said} Tell me some more about when you took life, when Sethe borned you in the boat."

"She never told me all of it," said Denver

"Tell me!"

Denver climbed up on the bed and folded her hands under her apron. She had not been in her tree room once since Beloved sat on their stump after the carnival. Had not remembered that she hadn't gone until this very desperate moment. Nothing was ^{out} there that this sister-^{girl}woman did not provide in abundance: a racing heart, dreaminess, society, danger, beauty. She swallowed twice to prepare for the telling, to construct ~~up~~ out of the ^{strings} ~~pieces~~ she had heard all her life a ^{net} ~~quilt~~ to ^{hold} ~~cover~~ Beloved.

"She had good hands, she said. The white girl, she said, had thin little arms but good hands. She saw that right ⁺ away, she said. Hair for five heads and good hands, she said. I ^{guess} ~~think~~ the hands made her think she could do it: get ^{us} ~~them~~ both across the river. But the mouth was what kept her from being ^{scared} ~~afraid~~. She said there ain't nothing to go by with white people. You don't know how they'll jump. Say one thing, do another. But if you looked at the mouth sometimes you could tell by that. She said this girl talked a storm, but there wasn't no meanness around her mouth. She took ^{my Ma'am} ~~me~~ to that lean-to and rubbed her feet for her, so that ^{was} ~~it~~ one thing. And ^{my Ma'am} ~~Mama~~ believed she wasn't going to turn her over. You could get money if you turned a runaway over. And ^{she} ~~Mama~~ wasn't sure this girl Amy didn't need money more ^{than} ~~for~~ anything, especially since all she talked about was getting hold of some velvet."

"What's velvet?"

"It's a cloth kind of deep and soft."

"Go 'head."

"Anyway, she rubbed ^{my Ma'am's} ~~Mama's~~ feet back to life, and ^{she} ~~Mama~~ cried, she said, from how it hurt. But it made her think she could make it

on over to where Grandma Baby Suggs was and..."

"Who is that?"

"I just said it. My Grandmother."

"Is that Sethe's mother?"

"No. My father's mother."

"Go 'head."

"That's where the others was. My brothers and my sister.

She sent them on before to wait for her at Grandma Baby's.

So she had to put up with everything to get there. And this here girl Amy helped."

Denver stopped and sighed. This was the part of the story she loved. She was coming to it now, and she loved it because it was all about herself; but she hated it too because it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it. But who she owed or what to pay it with eluded her. Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just hear it: there was this nineteen year old slave girl--a year older than herself--walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker's quiet step.

Denver was seeing it now and feeling it--through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her--and a heart beat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved's insterst like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved. The dark quilt with two orange patches was there with them because Beloved wanted it near her when she slept. It was smelling like grass and feeling like hands--the unrested hands of busy women: dry, warm, prickly. Denver spoke; Beloved listened and the tgwo dis the best they could to recreate what really happened, how it really was, something only Setheknew because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it. The quality of Amy's voice, her breath like burning wood. The quick-change weather up in those hills--cool at night, hot in the day, sudden fog. How recklessly she behaved with this white girl--a recklessness born of desperation and encouraged by Amy's fugitive eyes.

"You ain't got no business walking round these hills, miss."

"Looky here who's talking. I got more business here n you got. They catch you they cut your head off. Ain't nobody after me but I know somebody after you." Amy pressed her fingers into the soles of the slave woman's feet. "Whose baby that?"

Sethe did not answer.

"You don't even know. Come here Jesus," Amy sighed and shook her head. "Hurt?"

"A touch."

"Good for you. More it hurt more better it is. Can't nothing heal without pain you know What you wriggling for?"

Sethe raised up on her elbows. Lying on her back so long had raised a ruckus between her shoulder blades. The if fire in her feet and the fire on her back made her sweat.

"My back hurts me," she said.

"Your back? Gal, you a mess. Turn over here and let me see."

In an effort so great it made her sick to her stomach, Sethe turned on to her right side. Amy unfastened the back of her dress and said "Come here Jesus," when she saw. Sethe guessed it must be bad because after that call to Jesus, Amy didn't speak for a while. but in the unusual silence of an Amy struck dumb for a change, Sethe felt the fingers of those good hands lightly touch her back. She could hear breathing but still the white girl said nothing. Sethe could not move. She couldn't lie on her stomach or her back, and to keep on her side meant pressure on her screaming feet. Any spoke at last in her dreamwalker's voice.

unusual
In the ^{an} silence of Amy Stuck
dumb for a charge. Sethe

~~Then she felt the fingers of those good hands lightly touch the~~
~~burning on her back.~~ ^{She could hear the ~~the~~ ^{sobbing} breathing but} Still, ~~she~~ ^{the white girl} said nothing. Sethe could not
move. She couldn't lie on her stomach or her back, and to keep on
her side meant pressure on her screaming feet. ~~At last~~ ^{at last} ~~she~~ ^{spoke}

→ "It's a tree, Sister. A choke cherry tree. See, here's the trunk
--it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the
parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches.
Leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny
little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree
on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder. I had me some
whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this. Mr. Buddy had
^{right} a evil hand too. Whip you for looking at him straight. Sure would.
I looked right at him one time and he hauled off and threw the poker
at me. Guess he knew what I was a thinking"

Sethe groaned and Amy cut her reverie short--long enough to
shift Sethe's feet so the weight, resting on leaf-covered stone,
was above the ankles.

"That better? Lord what a way to die. You gonna die in here,
you know. Ain't no way out of it. Thank your Maker I come along
so's you wouldn't have to die outside in them weeds. Snake come along
he bite you. Bear eat you up. Maybe you should of stayed where
you was, Sister. I can see by your back why you didn't ha ha. Who-
ever planted that tree beat Mr. Buddy by a mile. Glad I ain't you. ^{Well,}
Spider webs is 'bout all I can do for you. What's in here aint
enough. I'll look outside. Used to could use moss, but sometimes
bugs and things is in it. Maybe I ought to break them blossoms
open. Get that pus to running, you think? Wonder what God had

in mind. You must of ^{did} ~~done~~ something. Don't run off nowhere now." ~~said Amy and laughed her baby laugh.~~

Sethe ^{could} ~~could~~ hear her chuckling away in the bushes as ~~she~~ hunted spiderwebs. ^{A chuckling} She concentrated on it because as soon as Amy ducked out, the baby began to stretch. Good question, she was thinking.

What did He have in mind? Amy had left the back of Sethe's dress open and now a tail of wind hit it, taking the pain down a step.

Sethe swallowed and tried to squeeze her toes. ~~She could hear the chatter as Amy approached.~~ ^{Amy's chatter heard for} ~~chatter as Amy approached.~~ ^{Amy returned with two palmsful} She had a fistful of web which she

cleaned of prey and then draped on Sethe's back, saying it was like stringing a tree for Christmas.

"We ^{got} ~~had~~ a old nigger girl come by our place. She don't know nothing. Sews stuff for Mrs/ Buddy Real fine lace but could just barely stick two words together. She don't know nothing just like you. You don't ^{got} ~~to~~ know a thing. End up dead that's what. Not me. I'm a get to Boston and get my self some velvet. Carmine. You don't even know about that do you? Now you never will. ^{But} ~~you~~ ^{even} ~~never~~ sleep with the sun in your face ^{to} ~~to~~ Feels good. I did it a couple of times. Most times I'm feeding stock before light and don't get to sleep till way after dark comes. But I was in the back of the wagon once and fell asleep. Sleeping with the sun in your ^{face} ~~face~~ is the best old feeling. Two times I did it. Once when I was little. Didn't nobody bother me then. Next time ^{it} ~~e~~, in back of the wagon, happened again and doggone if the chickens didn't get loose. Mr/ Buddy whipped my tail. Kentucky ain't no good place to be. ⁱⁿ ~~be~~ Boston's the place to be. ⁱⁿ ~~be~~ That's where my mother was before she was give to Mr. Buddy. Joe Nathan said Mr. Buddy is my daddy but I don't believe that, you?"

Sethe told her she didn't believe Mr. Buddy was her daddy.

"You know your daddy, ^{do you?} ~~huh?~~"

"No," said Sethe.

"Neither me. All I know is it ain't him." She stood up, then, having finished her repair work and, weaving about the lean-to, her slow-moving eyes pale in the sun that lit her hair, she sang,

"When the busy day is done and my weary little one
Rocketh gently to and fro when the night winds softly blow
And the crickets in the glen chirp and chirp and chirp again
Whene 'pon the haunted green fairies dance around their queen
Then from yonder misty skies cometh lady Button Eyes.

Suddenly she stopped weaving and rocking and sat down, her skinny arms wrapped around her knees, her good good hands ~~xx~~ cupping her elbows. Her slow-moving eyes stopped and peered into the dirt at her feet. "That's my mother's song. She taught me it."

"Through the muck and mist and gloam to our quiet cozy home
Where to singing sweet and low rocks a cradle to and fro
Where the clock's dull monotone telleth of the day that's done,
Where the moon beams hover o'er playthings sleeping on the floor
Where my weary we^e one lies cometh Lady[#] Button Eyes.

"Layeth she her hands upon My dear weary little one
And those white hands overspread like a veil the curley head
Seem to fondle and caress every little silken tress
Then she smoothes the eye lids down over those two eyes of brown
In such soothing tender wise cometh Lady Button Eyes
Hush, my sweet! from yonder skies cometh Lady Botton Eyes")

Amy sat quietly after her song then repeated the last line ~~again~~ be-

fore she stood, left the lean to and walked off a little ways to lean against a young ash. When she came back the sun was in the valley below and they were way above it in blue Kentucky light.

"You ain't dead yet, Sister?"

"Not yet."

"Make you a bet. You make it through the night, you make it all the way." Amy rearranged the leaves for comfort and knelt down to massage the swollen feet again. "Give these one more real good rub, " she aid, and when Sethe sucked air through her teeth, she said "Shut up. You got to keep your mouth shut."

Sethe bit down on her lips and let the good hands go to work to the tune of "so bees, sing soft and bees, sing low." Afterwards she moved to the other side of the lean to where, seated she loared her head toward her shoulder and braided her hair saying "Don't up and die on me in the night you hear? I don't want to see you ugly black face hankering over me. If you do die, just go on off somewhere where I can't see you, hear?"

"I hear," said Sethe. "I'll do what I can. Miss."

Sethe never expected to see another thing in this world so when she felt toes prodding her hip it took a while to come out of a sleep she thought was death. She sat up, stiff and shivery while Amy looked in on her juicy back.

"Looks like the devil," said Amy, But you made it through. Come down here, Jesus, Sister made it through. That's because of me. I'm good at sick things. Can you walk, you think?"

"I have to let my water, Miss, some kind of way."

"Let's see you walk on em."

It was not good, but it was possible, so Sethe limped, holding on first to Amy, then to a sapling.

"Was me did it. I'm good at sick things ain't I?"

"Yes, Miss," said Sethe, "you good."

"We got to get off this here hill. Come on. I'll take you down to the river. That ought to suit you. Me, I'm going to the Pike. Take me straight to Boston. What's that all over your dress?"

"Milk."

"You one mess."

Sethe looked down at her stomach and touched it. The baby was dead. She had not died in the light, but the baby had. If that was the case, then there was no stopping now. She would get that milk to her baby girl if she had to swim.

"Ain't you hungry?" Amy asked her.

"I ain't nothing but in a hurry, Miss."

"Whoa. Slow down. Want some shoes?"

"Say what?"

"I figured how," said Amy and so she had. She tore two pieces from Sethe's shawl, filled them with leaves and tied them over her feet, chattering all the while.

"How old are you, Sister? I been bleeding for four years but I aint having nobody's baby. Won't catch me sweating milk cause..."

"I know," said Sethe. "You going to Boston."

At noon they saw it; then they were near enough to hear it. By late afternoon ^{they} they could drink from it if they wanted to. Four stars were visible by the time they found, not a river = boat to ⁺ ~~show~~ Sethe away on, or a ferryman willing to take on a fugitive passenger. Nothing like that. But a whole boat to steal. It had one oar, lots of holes and two bird nests.

"There you go, Sister. Jesus looking at you."

Sethe was looking at seven miles of darkening water which would have to be split with one oar against a current dedicated to the ^{TIC}, two hundred miles below. It looked like home., and the baby (not dead in the least) must have thought so too. As soon as Sethe got close to the river her own water broke loose to join it. The break, followed by the pointless announcement of labor, bent her low.

"What you doing that for?" wailed Amy. "Ain't you got a brain in yer head? Stop that right now. You can't have no baby now. You the dumbest thing on this here earth. What you doing it for? Huh? You trying me, O Lord you try[~]ing me. Sister! Sister!"

Sethe couldn't think of anywhere to go but in. She waited for the sweet beat that followed the blast of pain. On her knees again, she crawled into the boat. It waddled under her and she had just enough time to brace her leaf-bag feet on the bench when another rip took her breath away. Panting under four spring stars, she threw her legs over the sides, because here come ^{the} the head, as Amy informed her as though she did not know it--as though the rip was ^a break up of walnut logs in the brace, or of lightening's jagged fear through a leather sky,

It was stuck. Face up and drowning in its mother's blood.

Amy stopped begging Jesus and began to curse his daddy.

"Push!" screamed Amy

"Pull," whispered Sethe.

And the strong hands went to work a fourth time, none too soon, for river water, seeping through any hole it chose, was spreading over Sethe's hips. She reached one arm back and grabbed the rope while Amy fairly clawed at the head. When a foot rose from the river bed and kicked the bottom of the boat and Sethe's behind, she knew it was done and permitted herself a short faint. Coming to she heard no cries, just Amy's encouraging coos. Nothing happened for so long, they both believed they had lost it. Sethe arched suddenly and the after birth shot out. Then the baby whimpered and Sethe looked. Twenty inches of cord hung ~~xxxxxx~~ from its belly and it trembled in the cool evening air. Amy wrapped her skirt around it and the wet sticky women ~~trio~~ clambered ashore to see what, indeed, God had in mind.

Spores of gentian in the hollows along the river bank floated toward the water in wavey purple lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river's edge when the sunshots are low and drained. Often they are mistook for insects--but they are seeds in which the whole flower sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is ^a easy to believe ^{each} ~~ea~~ one ^{has} ~~had~~ one--will become all of what is contained in the spore; will live out its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer perhaps, than the spore itself.

On a riverbank in the cool of a spring evening, ~~the~~ two women^N struggled under a shower^f of gentian spores. They ~~would~~ never ^{expected} to see each other again in this world and at the moment couldn't care less. But there on ^a spring night surrounded by gentian they did something together appropriate^{ly} and well. A pateroller passing would have sniggered to see two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws^f—a slave and a barefoot white woman with unpinned hair^f, wrapping a ten minute old baby in ~~pieces of~~ the rags they wore. But no pateroller came, no preacher. The water sucked and swallowed itself beneath them. There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well.

Night came on^f and Amy said she had to go; that she wouldn't be caught dead in daylight on a busy river with a runaway. After^e rinsing her hands and face in ~~the~~ river, she stood and looked down at the baby wrapped and tied to Sethe's chest.

"She^e never gonna know who I am. You gonna tell her? Who brought her into this here world?" She lifted her chin looked off into the place where the sun used to be. "Say Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston."

Sethe felt herself falling ~~xx~~ into a sleep she knew would be deep. On the lip of it, just before going ^dunder, she thought: That's pretty. Denver. Real pretty."

man looked over his shoulder at her--a quick look since all
When they reached the woods it took her no time to find the
path through it because big city revivals were held there ~~now~~
regularly, ^{now} complete with food laden tables, banjos and a tent.
The ~~dee~~ path they entered was a track now, but still arched
over with trees ~~just now~~ dropping buckeyes onto the grass
below.

There was nothing to be done other than what
she had done, but Sethe blamed herself for Baby Suggs' collapse.
However many times Baby denied it, Sethe knew the grief at 124
started when she jumped down off the wagon, her newborn tied
to her chest with the underwear of a white girl looking for
Boston.

Followed by the two girls, down a bright green corridor of
oak and ~~smoking hot~~, Sethe began to sweat a sweat just like
the other one when she ^{woke} ~~stood~~ mud-caked on the banks of the
Ohio.

Amy was gone. Sethe was alone and weak, but alive and so
was her baby. She walked aways downriver and then stood gazing
at the glimmering water. By and by a flatbed slid into view,
but she could not see if the figures on it were white people
or not. She began to sweat from a fever she thanked God for
since it would certainly keep her baby warm. When the flatbed
was beyond her sight she stumbled on and found herself near
three ^{Coloreds} ~~blacks~~ fishing--two boys and an older man. She stopped
and waited to be spoken to. One of the boys pointed and then

man looked over his shoulder at her--a quick look since all he needed to know about her he could see in no time.

No one said anything for a while. Then the man said "Head in cross?"

"Yes, sir." said Sethe.

^{ANY}"Naybody know you coming?"

"Yes Sir."

He looked at her again and nodded toward a rock that stuck out of the ground above him like a bottom lip. Sethe walked to it and sat down. Then stone had eaten the sun rays ^{but} ~~and~~ was ^{where near as hot as} ~~hotter than~~ she was. Too tired to move, she stayed there, the

sun in her eyes making her dizzy. Sweat poured over her and bathed the baby completely. She must have slept sitting up, because when next she opened her eyes, the man was standing ^{in front of her} with a smoking hot piece of fried eel in his hands. It was

an effort to reach for, more to smell, impossible to eat. She begged him for water and he gave her some of the Ohio in a ^{for} ~~can~~.

Sethe drank it all and begged more. The clanging was back in her head but she refused to believe that she had come all that way, endured all she had to die on the wrong side of the river.

The man watched her streaming face and called one of the boys over.

"Take off that coat," he told him.

"Sir?"

"You heard me."

The boy slipped out of his jacket whining "What you gonna do? What I'm gonna wear?" *It's cold out here.*

The man untied the baby from her chest and wrapped it in the boy's coat, knotting the arms in front.

"What I'm gonna wear?"

The old man sighed and, after a pause, said "You want it back, then go head and take it off that baby. Put the baby naked in the grass and put your coat back on. And if you do it then go on way somewhere and don't come back."

The boy dropped his eyes, then turned to join the other. With eel in her hand, the baby at her feet, Sethe dozed, dry-mouthed and sweaty. *After noon* ~~Evening~~ came and the man touched her shoulder.

Contrary to what she expected they rowed down river, far away from the row boat Amy had found. Just when she thought he was taken ^{ing} her back to Kentucky, he turned the flat bed and crossed the Ohio like a bullet. There he helped her up the steep bank, while the boy without a jacket carried the baby who wore it. The man led her to a brush-covered hutch with a beaten floor.

"Wait here. Somebody be here directly. Don't move. They'll find you."

"Thank you," she said. "I wish I knew your name so I could remember you right."

"Name's Stamp," he said. "Stamp Paid. Watch out for that there baby you hear?"

"I hear. I hear," she said, but she didn't. An hour later

a woman was right up on her before she heard a thing. A short woman, young, with a crocker sack, greeted her.

"Saw the sign while ago," she said, "But I couldn't get here no quicker."

"What sign?" asked Sethe.

"Stamp leaves the old sty open when there's a crossing. Knots a white rag on the post if it's a child too."

She knelt and emptied the sack. "My name's Ella," she said, taking a ~~skirt~~ ^{Cotton cloth}, wool blanket, two baked sweet potatoes and a pair of men's shoes from the sack. "My husband John is out yonder a ways. Where you headin?"

Sethe told her about Baby Suggs and Bluestone Road where she had sent her three children.

Ella wrapped a cloth tight around the baby's navel as she listened for the holes--the things the fugitives did not say; the ^{strip} questions they did not ask. Listened too for the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind. She shook gravel from the men's shoes and tried to force Sethe's feet into them. They would not go. Sadly, the split them down the heel, sorry indeed to ruin so valuable an item. Sethe put on the ^{boy's} ~~skirt~~ ^{Jacket} not daring to ask whether there was any word of the children.

"They made it," said Ella. "Stamp ferried some of that party. Left them with the woman on Bluestone. It aint too far."

Sethe couldn't think of anything to do, so grateful was she, so she peeled ~~the~~ ^a potatoes, ate, spit it up, and ate more in quiet celebration.

"They be glad to see you," said Ella. "When was this one born?"

Yesterday," said Sethe wiping sweat from under her chin. "I hope she makes it."

Ella looked at the tiny, dirty face poking out of the wool blanket and shook her head. "Hard to say," she said. "If anybody was to ask me I'd say 'Don't love nothing.'" Then, as if to take the edge off her pronouncement, she smiled at Sethe. "You had that baby by yourself?"

"No. White girl helped."

"Then we better make tracks."

Baby Suggs kissed her on the mouth and refused to let her see the children. They were asleep she said and Sethe was too ugly looking to wake them in the night. She took the newborn and handed it to a young woman in a bonnet.

"Has it cried out yet?" asked Baby

"No Ma'am."

"Time enough. Let's get the mother well."

She led Sethe to the keeping room and by the light of a spirit lamp bathed her in sections, starting with her face. Then while waiting for another pan of heated water, she sat next to her and stitched gray cotton. Sethe dozed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms. After each bathing, Baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. Tearing sheets, stitching the gray cotton, and supervising the woman in the bonnet who was cooking and tending the baby. When Sethe's

legs were done, Baby looked at her feet and wiped them lightly. She cleaned between Sethe's legs with two separate pans of hot water then tied her stomach and vagina with sheets. Finally she attacked the unrecognizable feet.

"You feel this?"

"Feel what?" asked Sethe

"Nothigg. Heave up." She helped Sethe to a rocker and lowered her feet into a bucket of salt water and juniper. All night Sethe sat soaking. The crust from her nipples Baby softened with lard and then washed away. By dawn the silent baby woke and took her mother's milk.

"Pray God it aint turned bad." said Baby. "And when you through call me." As she turned to go, Baby Suggs caught a glimpse of something dark on the bed sheet. She frowned and looked at her daughter-in-law bedding toward the baby. Roses of blood blossomed in blanket covering Sethe's shoulders. Baby Suggs hid her mouth with her hand. When the nursing was over and the newborn was asleep--its eyes half open, its tongue dream-sucking, wordlessly the older woman greased the flowering back and pinned a double thickness of cloth to the inside of the newly stiched dress.

It was not real yet. Not yet. But when her sleepy boys and crawling already/ girl were brought in, it didn't matter whether it was real or not. Sethe lay in bed under, around, over,

Sethe. "Going away present?"

"Wedding present."

among but especially with them all. The little girl dribbled clear spit into her face, and Sethe's laugh of delight was so loud the crawling already baby blinked. Buglar and Howard played with her ugly feet, after daring each other to be the frist to touch them. She kept kissing them. She kissed the backs of their necks, the tops of their heads and the center of their palms, and it ²ws the boys who decided enough was enough when she lifted their shirts to kiss their tight round bellies. She stopped when and because they said "Pappie comin?"

She didn't cry. She said "soon" and smiled so they would think the brightness in her eyes was love alone. It was some time before she let Baby Suggs shoo the boys away so Sethe could put on the gray gotton dress her mother-in-law had started stitching together the night before. Finally she lay back and cradled the crawling ^{already?} girl in her arms. She enclosed her left nipple with two fingers of her right hand and the child opened her mouth. They hit home together.

Baby Suggs came in and gathered up the ball of rags that had been Sethe's clothes.

"Nothing worth saving in here," she said.

Sethe lifted her eyes. "Wait," she called. "Look and see if there's something still knotted up in the petticoat."

Baby Suggs inched the soiled fabric through her fingers and came upon what felt like pebbles. She held them out toward Sethe. "Going away present?"

"Wedding present."

"Be nice if there was a groom to go with it." She gazed into her hand. "What you think happend to him?"

"I don't know," said Sethe. "He wasn't where he said to meet him at. I had to get out. Had to." Sethe watched the drowsy eyes of the sucking girl for a moment then looked at Baby Suggs' face. "He'll make it. If I made it, Halle sure can."

"Well, put these on. Maybe they'll light his way." She handed the stones to Sethe.

"I need holes in my ears."

"I'll do it," Baby Suggs. "Soon's you up to it."

Sethe jiggled the earrings for the pleasure of the crawling already? girl who reached for them over and over and over again.

In the clearing Sethe found Baby's old preaching rock and remembered the smell of leaves simmering in the sun, thunderous feet and the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of [TK] With Baby Suggs heart in charge the people let go.

She had had twenty-eight days--the travel of one whole moon--of unslaved life. From the pure clear stream of spit that the little girl dribbled into her face to her oily blood was twenty-eight days. Days of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company: of knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own which made it better. One taught

her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and decide what to do with the day. That's how she got through the waiting for Halle. Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the other ^{she} had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was quite another.

Now she sat on Baby Suggs rock, Denver and Beloved in the trees watching her.

Just the fingers, she thought. Just let me feel your fingers again on the back of my neck and I will lay it all down, make a way out of this no way. Sethe bowed her head and sure enough--they were there. Lighter now, no more than the strokes of bird feathers, but unmistakably caressing fingers. She had to relax a bit to let them do their work, so light was the touch, childlike almost, more finger kiss than kneading. Still she was grateful for the effort; Baby Suggs' long distance love was equal to any skin-close love she had known. The desire, let alone the gesture, to meet her need was good enough to lift her spirits to the place where she could take the next step: ask for some clarifying word; some advice about how to keep on with a brain greedy for news nobody could live with in a world happy to provide it.

She knew Paul D was adding something to her life--something she wanted to count on but was scared to. Now he had added more: new pictures and old rememories that broke her heart.

Into the empty space of now^t knowing about Halle--a space sometimes coloredd with righteous resentment at what could have been his cowardice, or stupidity or bad luck--that empty place of no definite news was filled now with a brand new sorrow and who could tell how many more on the way. Years ago--when 124 was alive, she had women friends, men friends from all around to share grief with. Now there was no one, for they would not visit her while the baby ghost filled the house, and she returned their disapproval with the potent pride of the mistreated. But now there was someone to share it, and he had beat it away the very day he n^etered her house and no sign of it since. A blessing, but in its place, he brought another kind of haunting: Halle's face smeared with butter and the clabber too; his own mouth jammed full of iron, and Lord knows what else he could tell her if he wanted to.

The fingers touching the back of her neck were stronger now--the strokes bolder as though BABY SUGGS were gathering strength. Putting her thumbs at the nape, while the fingers pressed the sides. Harder, harder, the fingers moved slowly around toward her windpipe, making little circles on the way. Sethe was actually more surprised than frightened to find that she was being strangled. Or so it seemed. In any case, Baby Suggs fingers had a grip on her that would ~~not~~^{NOT} let her

breathe. Tumbling forward from her seat on the rock, she clawed at the hands that were not there. Her feet were thrashing by the time Denver got to her and then Beloved.

"Ma'am! Ma'am!" Denver shouted. "Ma'ammie!" and turned her mother over on her back.

The fingers left off and Sethe had to swallow huge draughts of air before she recognized her daughter's face next to her own and Beloved's hovering above.

"You all right?"

"Somebody choked me," said Sethe.

"Who?"

Sethe rubbed her neck and struggled to a sitting position.

"Grandma Baby, I reckon. I just asked her to rub my neck, like she used to and she was doing fine and then just got crazy with it I guess."

"She wouldn't do that to you, Ma'am. Grandma Baby? Uh uh."

"Help me up from here."

"Look." Beloved was pointing at Sethe's neck.

"What is it? What you see?" asked Sethe.

"Bruises." said Denver.

"On my neck?"

"Here," said Beloved. "Here and over here, too." She reached out her hand and touched the splotches, gathering color on Sethe's throat and her fingers were mighty cool.

"If I rub them, maybe they'll go away."

"That don't help nothing." Denver said, but Beloved was leaning in, her two hands storking the damp skin that felt like chamois and looked like taffeta.

Sethe moaned. The girl's fingers were so cool and knowing. Sethe's knotted, private, walk-on-water life gave in a bit, softened and it seemed that the glimpse of happiness she caught in the shadows swinging hands on the road to the carnival was a likelihood--if she could just manage the news Paul D brought and the news he kept to himself. Just manage it. Not break, fall or cry each time a hateful picture drifted in front of her face. Like Baby Suggs' friend whose food was full of gears. Like [TK] who could not, would not sleep in a bed. Like [TK] who only slept under it. All she wanted was to go on__. As she had. Alone with her daughter in a haunted house she managed every damn thing. Why now, with Paul D instead of the ghost, was she breaking up? getting scared? needing Baby? The worse was over, wasn't it? She had already got through, hadn't she? With the ghost in 124 she could bear, do solve anything. Now a hint of what had happened to Halle and she cut out like a rabbit looking for its mother.

Beloved's fingers were heavenly. Under them and breathing evenly again the anguish rolled down. The peace Sethe had come there to find crept into her.

"We must look a sight," she thought and closed her eyes.

The three women in the middle of the Clearing, at the base of the rock where Baby Suggs, holy, had loved. One seated yielding up her throat to the kind hands of one of the two kneeling before her.

Denver watched the faces of the other two. Beloved watched the work her thumbs were doing and must have loved what she saw because she leaned down and kissed the tenderness under Sethe's chin.

They stayed that way for a while because neither Denver nor Sethe knew how not to: how to stop and not love the look or feel of the lips that kept on kissing. Then Sethe, grabbing Beloved's hair and blinking rapidly, separated herself. She later believed that it was because the girl's breath was exactly like new milk that she said to her, stern and frowning, "You too old for that."

She looked at Denver and seeing panic about to become something more, stood up quickly, breaking the tableau apart.

"Come on UP! Up!" Sethe waved the girls to their feet. As they cleared the Clearing they looked pretty much the same as they had when they had come: Sethe in the lead, the girls a ways back. All silent as before but with a difference. Sethe was bothered, not because of the kiss, but because, just before it, when she was feeling so fine, letting Beloved massage away the pain, the fingers she was loving and the ones that had soothed her before they entangled her reminded of something that now slipped her mind. But one thing for sure, Baby Suggs had not choked her as

first she thought. Denver was right, and walking in the dappled tree-light, clearer-headed now--away from the enchantment of the Clearing, Sethe remembered the touch of those fingers that she knew better than her own. They had bathed her in sections, wrapped her womb, combed her hair, oiled her nipples, stitched her clothes, cleaned her feet, greased her back, and dropped just about anything they were doing to massage Sethe's nape when, especially in the early days, her spirits fell down under the weight of the things she remembered and those she did not: school teacher writing in ink she herself had made while his nephews played on her; the face of the woman in a felt hat as she rose to stretch in the field. If she stood among all the hands in the world, she would know Baby Suggs' as she did the good hands of the white girl looking for velvet. But for eighteen years she and lived in a house full of touches from the other side. And the thumbs that pressed her nape were the same. Maybe that was where it had gone to. After Paul D beat it out of 124, maybe it collected itself in the Clearing. Reasonable, she thought.

Why she had taken Denver and Beloved with her didn't puzzle her now--at the time it seemed impulse, with a vague wish for protection. And the girls had saved her, Beloved so agitated she behaved like a two year old.

Like a faint smell of burning that disappears when the fire is cut off or the window opened for a breeze, the suspicion that the girl's touch was also exactly like the baby ghost's dissipated.

Sethe and that Denver and she liked each other's company.

It was only a tiny disturbance anyway--not strong enough to divert her from the ambition swelling in her now: she wanted Paul D. No matter what he told and knew, she wanted him in her life. That's what she came to the Clearing to figure out and now it was figured. Trust and rememory, yes, the way she believed it could be when he cradled her before the cooking stove. The weight and angle of him; the true-to-life beard hair on him; arched back, educated hands. His awful human power. The mind of him that knew her own. Her story was bearable because it was his as well--to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other--the things neither had word-shapes for... well it would come in time--where they led him off to sucking iron; the perfect death of her crawling already? baby. It would come in time.

She wanted to get back--fast. Set these idle girls to some work that would fill their wandering heads. Rushing through the green corridor cooler now because the sun had moved, it occurred to her that the two were alike as sisters. Their obedience and absolute reliability shot through with surprise. Sethe understood Denver. Solitude had made her secretive--self-manipulated. Years of haunting had dulled her in ways you wouldn't believe and sharpened her in ways you wouldn't believe either. The consequence was a timid but hard-headed daughter Sethe would die to protect. The other, Beloved, she knew less, nothing, about--except that there was nothing she wouldn't do for

Sethe and that Denver and she liked each other's company. Now she thought she knew why. They spent up or held on to their feelings in harmonious ways. What one had to give, the other was thrilled to take. They hung back in the trees that ringed the Clearing then rushed into it with screams and kisses when Sethe choked--anyhow that's how she explained it to herself for she noticed neither competition between the two nor domination by one. On her mind was the supper she wanted to fix for Paul d--something difficult to do, something she would do just so--to launch her newer, stronger life with a tender man. Those litty, bitty potatoes browned on all sides, heavy on the pepper; snap beans seasoned with rind; tomato slices sprinkled with vinegar and sugar. Maybe corn cut from the cob and fried with green onions and butter. Raised bread, even.

Her mind, searching the kitchen before she got to it, was so full of her offering, she did not see right away, in the space under the white ^{stairs} stairs, the wooden tub and Paul D sitting in it. She smiled at him and he smiled back.

"Summer must be over?" she said.

"Come on in here."

"Uh uh. Girls right behind me."

"I don't hear nobody."

"I have to cook, Paul D."

"Me too." He stood up and made her stay there while he held her in his arms. Her dress soaked up the water from his body. His

jaw was near her ear. Her chin touched his shoulder.

"What you gonna cook?"

"I thought some snap beans."

"Oh, yeah."

"Fry up a little corn?"

"Yeah."

There was no question but that she could do it. Just like the day she arrived at 124--sure enough, she had milk enough for all.

Make it all right. Ma'am. Ma'am. Ma'am. Make it all right.

Not further. Not now. Because the look on Sethe's face as she rose from the rock was bad.

Beloved turned around and left. Denver had not arrived.

Beloved came through the door and they ought to have heard her shoes, but they didn't.

Breathing and murmuring, breathing and murmuring. Beloved heard them as soon as the screen banged shut behind her. She jumped at the slam and swiveled her head toward the whispers coming from behind the white stairs. She took a step and felt llike crying. She had been so cose, then closer, And it was so much better than the anger that ruled when Sethe did or thought anything that excluded herself. She could bear the hours--nine or ten of them each day but one, when Sethe was gone. Bear even, the nights when she was close but out of sight, behind walls and doors lying next to him. But now--even the daylight time that Beloved had counted on, disciplined herself to be content with, was being reduced, divided by SEthe's willingness to pay attention to oether things. Him mostly. Him who said something to her that made her run out into the woods and sit quivering and crying on a rock. Him who kept her hidden at night behind doors. And him who had hold of her now whispering behind the stairs when Beloved was ready to put her hand in that woman's own.

Make it all right. Ma'am. Ma'ammie. Ma'am, make it all right.

Not further. Not now. Because the look on Sethe's face as she rose from the rock was bad.

Beloved turned around and left. Denver had not arrived,

or else she was hiding somewhere outside. Beloved went to look, pausing to watch a cardinal hop from limb to branch. She followed the blood spot shifting in the leaves until she lost it and even then she walked on, backwards, still hungry for another glimpse.

TK TK TK

"You did it, I saw you."

"What you talking aoubt? I was right next to you."

"I saw your face."

"Hush up."

"You made her choke."

"Why would I do that?"

"I don't know. You told me you loved her."

"I fixed it, didn't I? Didn't I fix her neck?"

"After. After you choked her neck."

"Why don't you stop? I kissed her neck. I didn't choke it."

"I saw you." Denver grabbed Beloved's arm.

"Look out, girl!" said Beloved and, snatching her arm away ran head as fast as she could toward the stream that sang on the other side of the woods.

Left alone, Denver wondered if, indeed she had been wrong. She and Beloved ^{were} standing in the trees whispering while Sethe sat on the rock. Denver knew ~~that~~ the Clearing used to be where Baby Suggs preached, but that was ^{when} ~~way~~ she was a baby. She had never been there herself to remember it.

124 and the field behind it was all the world she knew or wanted.

Once upon a time she had known more and wanted to. Had walked the path leading to a real other house. Had stood outside the window listening. Four times she did it on her own--crept away from 124 early in the afternoon when her mother and grand mother had their guard down, just before supper, after chores; the blank hour before gears changed to evening occupations. Denver walked off looking for the house so many children visited but not her. When she found it she was too timid to go to the front door so she peeped in the window. Lady Jones sat in a straight backed chair, several children sat cross-legged on ~~the~~ floor in front of her. Lady Jones had a book. The children had slates. Lady Jones was saying something too soft for Denver to hear. The children were ~~te~~ saying it after her. Four times Denver went to look. The fifth time Lady Jones caught her and said "Come in the front door, Miss Denver. This is not a side show."

So she had almost a whole year of the company of her peers and along with them learned to spell and count. She was 9, and those two hours in the afternoon were precious to her. Especially so because she had done it on her own and was pleased and surprised by the pleasure and surprise it created in her mother. For a nickel a month, Lady Jones did what white people thought unnecessary if not downright illegal: crowded her little parlor with the colored children who had time for and interest in book learning. The nickel, tied in a handkerchief knot, tied to her belt that she carried to Lady Jones thrilled her. The effort to handle chalk expertly and avoid the scream it could make; the capital w, the little i, the beauty of the letters in her name, the deeply mourn-

ful sentences from the Bible Lady Jones used as a textbook.

Denver practised every morning; starred every afternoon. She was so happy she didn't even know she was being avoided by her classmates-- that they made excuses and altered ^htheir pace not to walk with her. It was Nelson Lord--the boy as smart as she was--who put a stop to it; who asked her the question about her mother that put chalk, the little i and all the rest that those afternoons held out of reach forever. She should have laughed when he said it, or pushed him down, but there was no meanness in his face or his voice. Just curiosity. But the thing that leapt up in her when he asked it was a thing that had been lying there all along.

She never went back. The second day she didn't go, Sethe asked her why not. Denver didn't answer. She was too scared to ask the question Nelson Lord had, ^{of her brothers or anybody because} and certain odd and terrifying feelings about her mother were collecting around the thing that leapt up inside her. ^{did not} Later on, after Baby Suggs died, she wondered ~~about~~ ^{She did not agree with Sethe that they left} why Howard and Buglar ran away. ^{was it really the ghost?} If ^{because of} so, what took them so long? They had lived with it as long as she had. But if Nelson Lord was right---

Meantime the monstrous and unmanageable ^{dreams about} ~~feelings~~ toward Sethe found release in the concentration Denver began to fix on the baby ghost. Before Nelson Lord, she had been barely interest^{ed} in its antics. The patience ^{of} her mother and grandmother ^{in its presence} ~~showed~~ made her indifferent to it, and there were long periods when there was no sign of it anywhere. Now it held for her all the anger, love and fear she didn't know what to do with. Even when, once, she did muster the courage to ask Nelson Lord's question, she could not hear Sethe's answer, nor Baby Suggs' words, nor anything at all thereafter. For 2 years she walked in a silence too solid for penetration but

which gave her eyes a power even she found hard to believe. The black [^]nostrils of a sparrow sitting on a branch^h sixty feet above her head for instance. For 2 years she heard nothing at all and then ~~s~~ she head^h distant thunder crawling up the stairs. Baby Suggs thought it was Here Boy padding into places he never went. Sethe thought it was the India rubber ball the boys played with bouncing down the stairs.

"Is that damn dog lost his mind?" shouted Baby Suggs.

"He's on the porch," said Sethe. "See for yourself."

"Well, what's that I'm hearing then?"

Sethe slammed the stove lid. "Buglar! Buglar! I told you all not to use that ball in here." She looked at the white stairs and saw Denver at the top.

"She was trying to get upstairs."

"What?" The cloth she used to handle the stove lid was balled in Sethe's hand.

"The baby," said Denver. "Didn't you hear her crawling?"

What to jump on first was the problem: that Denver heard anything at all after two years or that the crawling ahead? baby girl was still at it but moreso^h.

The return of Denver's hearing, cut off by an answer she could not bear to her, cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs, signalled another shift in the fortunes of the people of 124. From then on the presence was full of spite. Instead of sighs and accidents there was pointed and deliberate abuse. Buglar and Howard grew furious at^h the company of the women in the house, ~~an~~ and spent any time they had away from their odd work carrying water and feed at the stables in sullen reproach. Until the spite became so personal it drove each off. Baby Suggs grew ^hfedired, went

your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?"

It was the second question that made it impossible for so long

to bed and stayed there untill her big old heart quit. Except for an occasional request for color she said practically nothing-- until the afternoon of the last day of her life when she got out of bed, skipped slowly to the door of the keeping room and announced to Sethe and Denver the lesson she had learned from her sixty years a slave and ten years free: That there was no bad luck in the world but white people. Then she returned to her bed, pulled up the quilt and left them to hold that thought forever.

Shortly afterward ^SSethe and Denver tried to call up and reason with the baby ghost, but ^{got} got nowhere. It took a man, Paul D, to shout it off, beat it off and take its place for himself. And carnival or no carnival, Denver preferred the venomous baby to him any day. During the first days after Paul D moved in, Denver stayed in her emerald closet as long as she could, lonely as a mountain and almost as big, thinking everybody had somebody, but her; thinking even a ghost's company was denied her. So when she saw the black dress with two unlaced shoes beneath it she trembled with secret thanks. Whatever her power and however she used it, Beloved was hers. Denver was alarmed by the harm she thought Beloved planned for Sethe--but felt helpless to thwart it, so unrestricted was her need to love another. The display she witnessed at the Clearing shamed her because the choice between Sethe and Beloved was without conflict.

Walking toward the ^{stream} creek, beyond her green bush house, she let her self wonder what if Beloved really decided to choke her mother. Would she let it happen? Murder, Nelson Lord had said. "Didn't

your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?"

It was the second question that made it impossible for so long to ask Sethe about the first. The thing that leapt up had been coiled in just such a place: a darkness; a stone, and some other thing ^{that} moved by itself. She went deaf rather than hear the answer and ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Like the little four o'clocks that searched openly for sunlight, then closed themselves tightly when it left, Denver kept watch for the baby and withdrew from everything else/ Until Paul D came. But the damage he did came undone with the miraculous resurrection of Beloved.

Just ahead, at the edge of the ~~xxxxx~~ ^{Stream} creek, Denver could see her silhouette, standing barefoot in the water, lifting her black skirts up above her calves. The beautiful head lowered in rapt attention.

Blinking fresh tears Denver approached her--eager for a word, a sign of forgiveness. None came.

Denver took off her shoes and stepped into the water with her. It took a moment for her to drag her eyes from the spectacle of Beloved's head to see what she was staring at.

A turtlew ^h inced along the edge, turned and climbed to dry ground. Not far behind was another, headed in the same direction.

^(A)
- insert turtles)

^(B)
Beloved dropped the folds of her skirt. It spread around her. The hem darkened in the water.

^(B)
[add] no height was ^e beyond her yearning neck, stretched like a finger toward his. To risk everything outside the bowl just to touch his face. The gravity of their shields clashing, countered and mocked ~~by~~ the ~~weightless~~ floating heads, touching.

the turtles

Four placed plates under a hovering motionless bowl. Behind her in the grass another, moving quickly, quickly to mount her. The impregnable strength of him--earthing his feet near her shoulders. The embracing necks--hers stretching up toward his bending down; the pat pat pat of their touching heads,

aiming for a last look
at Brother,

9. Chap 8

146

Out of sight of Mister's sight, away, praise His name, from the smiling boss of roosters, Paul D began to tremble. Not all at once and not so anyone could tell. When he turned his head, turned it as much as the rope that connected his neck to the axle of a buck board allowed, and, later on when they fastened the iron around his ankles and clamped the wrists as well, there was no outward sign of trembling at all. Nor, ^{18 days later that} when he saw the ditches ~~either~~; the one thousand feet of earth--five feet deep, five feet wide, into which wooden boxes had been constructed (fitted). A door of bars that you could life on hinges like a cage, opened into three walls and a roof of scrap lumber sunk into red dirt. Two feet of it over his head; three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters. And there were forty-five more.

Still no one knew it had started because the trembling began inside. A flutter of a kind, in the chest, then the shoulder blades. It felt like rippling--gentle at first and then wild. As though the further they led him South the more his blood, frozen like an ice pond for twenty-nine years, began thawing, breaking into pieces that, once melted, had no choice but to swirl and eddy. Some times it was in his leg. Then again it moved to the base of his spine. By the time they unhitched him from the wagon and he saw nothing but dogs and two shacks in a world of sizzling grass, the roiling blood was rocking him to and fro. Gently, gently, to and fro. But no one could tell. The wrists he held out for the ^{bracelets} clamps

that evening were steady as were the legs he stood on ~~at~~^{when} the chains were attached to the leg irons. But when they showed him into the box and dropped the cage door ~~down~~, his hands quit taking instruction. On their own, they traveled. Nothing could stop them or get their attention. They would not hold his penis to urinate or a spoon to scoop lumps of lima beans into his mouth. The miracle of their obedience came with the hammer at dawn.

All forty-six men woke to rifle shot. All forty-six. Three white men walked along the trench unlocking the doors one by one. No one stepped through. When the last lock was open, the three returned and lifted the bars, one by one. And one by one the black men emerged--promptly and without the poke of a rifle butt if they had been there more than a day; promptly with the butt if, like Paul D, they had just arrived. When all forty-six were standing ⁱⁿ a line in the trench, another rifle shot signalled the climb out and up to the ground above where one thousand feet of the best hand forged chain in Georgia stretched. Each man bent and waited. The first man picked up the end and threaded it through the loop on his leg iron. He stood up then and, shuffling a little, brought the chain tip to the next prisoner who did likewise. As the chain was passed on and each man stood in the other's place, the line of men turned around, facing the boxes they had come out of. Not one spoke to the other. At least not with words. The eyes had to tell what there was to tell: "Help me this mornin; 's bad"; "I'm a make it"; "Look out"; "New man"; "Steady now steady."

Chain-up over, they knelt down. The dew, more likely than not, was mist by then. Heavy, sometimes and if the dogs were

quiet ^{and} or just breathing you could hear doves. Kneeling in the mist they waited for the whim of a guard, or two, or three. Or maybe all of them wanted it. Wanted it from one prisoner in particular or none--or all.

"Breakfast? Want some breakfast, nigger?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Hungry, nigger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here you go."

Occasionally a kneeling man chose a bullet in his head instead as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus. Paul D did not know that then. He was looking at his palsied hands, ^{listening to the guards} smelling the guard, hearing his soft grunts so like the doves', as he stood before the man kneeling in mist on his right. Convinced he was next, Paul D retched--vomiting up nothing at all. ^{AN} The observing guard smashed his shoulder with the rifle and the engaged one decided to skip the new man for the time being lest his pants and shoes got soiled by nigger puke.

"Hiiii!"

It was the first sound, other than "yes sir" a black man was allowed to speak each morning, and the lead chain gave it everything he had. "Hiiii!" It was never clear to Paul D how he knew when to shout that mercy. They called him Ili Man and Paul D thought at first the guards told him when to give the signal that let the prisoners rise up off their knees and dance the two-step to the music of hand forged iron. Later he doubted it. He believed to this day that

the "Hiiii!" at dawn and the "Hoooo!" when evening came was the responsibility ~~of~~ Hi Man assumed because he alone knew what was enough, what was too much, when things were over, when the time had come.

They chain-danced over the fields, through the woods to a trail that ended in ^{the astonishing beauty of} ~~a quarry of~~ feldspar and there Paul D's hands disobeyed the furious rippling of his blood and paid attention. With a sledge hammer gripped in his hands and Hi Man's lead, the men got through. They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yeilded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves or seen others tame. They sang of bosses and masters and misses. Of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. They sang lovingly of graveyards and sisters long gone. Of pork in the woods; meal in the pan; fish on the line, cane, rain and rocking chairs.

And they beat. The women for having known them and no more, no more; the children for having been them ~~but~~ never again. They killed bosses so often and so completely they had to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time. Tasting hot meal cake among pine-trees, they beat it away. Singing love songs to Mr. Death, they smashed his head. More than the rest, they killed the flirt folks called life for leading them on. Making them think the next sunrise ~~or breath~~ would be worth it; that another stroke ~~of~~ time would do it at last. Only when she was dead would they be safe. The successful ones-the ones who had

The chain was threaded through forty-six loops of ^{maybe even} been there enough years to have maimed, mutilated and buried her-- kept watch over the others who were still in her cock-teasing ^{hug} ~~embrace~~, caring and looking forward, remembering and looking back. They were the ones whose eyes said "Help me, 's bad;" or "Look out," meaning this might be the day I bay or eat my own mess or run, and it was this last that had to be guarded against for if one pitched and ran--all, all forty-six, would be yanked by the chain that bound them and no telling who or how many would be killed. A man could take his own life, but not his brother's. So the eyes said "Steady now," and "Hang by me."

Eighty-six days and done. Life was dead. Paul D beat her butt all day everyday till there was not a whimper in her. Eighty six days and his hands were still, waiting serenely each rat-rustling night for "Hi!!!!" ^{at dawn} and the eager clench on the hammer's shaft. Life rolled over dead. Or so he thought.

It rained.

Snakes came down from short leaf pine and hemlock. The sun got up and went home.

It rained.

Cypress, yellow poplar, ash and palmetto drooped under five days of rain without wind. By the eighth day the doves were no where in sight, by the ninth even the salamanders were gone. Dogs lay their ears down and stared over their paws. The man could not work. Chain-up was slow, breakfast abandoned, the two-step became a slow drag over soupy grass and unreliable earth.

It was decided to lock everybody down in the boxes till it either stopped or lightened up so a white man could walk, ^{dammit,} without flooding his gun and the dogs could quit shivering.

The chain was threaded through forty-six loops of the best hand-forged iron in Georgia.

It rained.

In the boxes the men heard the water rise in the trench and looked out for cotton mouths. They ^{squatted} ~~stood~~ in muddy water, slept above it, peed in it. Paul D. thought he was screaming; his mouth was open and there was this loud throat-splitting sound--but it may have been somebody else. Then he thought he was crying. Something was running down his cheeks. He lifted his hands to wipe away the tears and saw dark brown slime. ^Above him rivulets of mud slid through the boards of the roof. "When it come down," he thought, "it gonna crush me like a tick bug." It happened so quick he had no time to ponder. Somebody yanked the chain--once--hard enough to cross his legs and throw him into the mud. He never figured out how he knew--how anybody did--but he did know--he did--and he took both hands and yanked the length of chain at his left, so the next man would know too. The water was ^{above} ~~just below~~ his ^{ankles} ~~knees~~, flowing over the wooden plank ^Ihe slept on. And then it wasn't water anymore. The ditch was caving in and mud oozed under and through the bars.

They waited--each and every one of the forty-six. Not screaming, although some of them must have fought like the devil not to. The mud was up to his thighs and he held on ^{to} the the bars. Then it came--another yank--from the left this time and less forceful than the first because of the mud it passed through.

It started like the chain-up but the difference was the power of the chained. One by one, from Hi Man back on down the line, they dove. Down through the mud ^d ~~under~~ the bars,

blind, groping. Some had sense enough to wrap their heads in their shirts, cover their faces with rags, put on their shoes. Others just plunged, simply ducked down and pushed out, fighting up, reaching for air. Some lost direction and his neighbor ^{snatched} feeling the confused pull of the chain, ~~yanked~~ him around. For one lost, all ^{lost} ~~lost~~. Then chain that held them would save all or none and Hi Man was the Delivery. They talked through that chain like Sam Morse and, Great God, they all came up. Like the unshriven dead, zombies on the loose, holding the chains in their hands, they trusted the rain and the dark, yes, but mostly Hi Man and each other.

Past the sheds where the dogs lay in deep depression; past the two guard shacks, past the stable of sleeping horses, past the hens whose bills were bolted into their feathers, they ~~tipped~~ (waded). The moon did not help because it wasn't there. The field was a marsh, the track a trough. All Georgia seemed to be sliding, melting away. Moss wiped their faces as they fought the live oak branches that blocked their way. Georgia took up all of Alabama and Mississippi then, so there was no state line to cross and it wouldn't have mattered anyway. If they had known about it, they would have avoided not only Alfred and the beautiful feldspar, but Savannah too and headed for the Sea Islands on the river that slid down from the Blue Ridge mountains. But they didn't know.

Daylight came and ^{they} ~~they~~ huddled in a copse of redbud trees. Night came and they scrambled up to higher ground, praying the rain would go on shielding them and keeping folks at home. They were hoping for a shack, solitary, some distance from its big

a dark ragged figure guided by the blossoming plums,,...

turned out to be
The apple field ~~was~~¹ Delaware where the weaver lady lived. She snapped him up as soon as he finished the sausage she fed him and he crawled ~~into~~¹ her bed crying. She passed him off as her nephew from Syracuse simply by calling him by that nephew's name. Eighteen months and he was looking out again for blossoms only this time he did the looking on a dray.

It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, Schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tabacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open.

[to "She moved him."]

She moved him.

Not the way he had beat off the baby ghost--all bang and shriek with windows smashed and jelly jars rolled in a heap. But she moved him none the less, and Paul D. never knew ^{how} ~~who~~ or how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself. Imperceptibly, downright reasonably, he was moving out of 124.

Tok

After supper he sat in the rocker ^e by the stove, bone tired, river ~~i~~ whipped and fell asleep. He woke to the footsteps of Sethe coming down the white stairs to make breakfast.

"I thought you went out somewhere," she said.

Paul D. moaned, surprised to find himself exactly where he was the last time he looked.

"Don't tell me I slept in this chair the whole night."

Sethe laughed. "Me? I won't say a word ^I to you."

"Why didn't you rouse me?"

"I did. Called you two or three times. I give it up around midnight and then I thought you went out somewhere."

He stood, expecting his back to fight it. But it didn't. Not a creak or a stiff joint anywhere. In fact he felt refreshed. Some things are like that, he thought, good-sleep places. The base of certain trees here and there; a wharf ~~or~~ a bench, a rowboat ^{once} ~~one~~, a haystack usually,

not alway^s as a bed and here, now, a rocking chair which was strange because in his exper^eince, furniture was the worst place for a good-sleep sleep.

The next evening he did it again and then again. He was accustomed to sex with Sethe just about every day, ^{and to avoid the confusion Beloved's shining} ~~so now~~ he made it his business ^{caused him} to take her ^{back upstairs} ~~back upstairs~~ in the morning, ~~or~~ ^{longest} lie down with her ~~at~~ ^{night.} But he ~~found~~ ^{found} a way and a reason to spend the ~~best~~ ^{longest} part of the night in the rocker. He told him^{self} it ~~must~~ must be his back-- something supportive it needed for a weakness left over from sleeping in a box in Georgia. ^{It went} It ~~went~~ on that way and might have stayed that way but one evening, after supper, after Sethe, he came down stairs, sat in the rocker and didn't want to be there. He stood up and realized he didn't want to go upstairs either. Irritable and longing for rest, he opened the door to Baby Suggs room and dropped off to sleep on the bed the old lady died in. That settled it--so it seemed. It became his room and Sethe ^{didn't object} ~~had no objections~~--her bed made for two had been occupied by one for eighteen years before Paul D. came ^{to} ~~to~~ call. And maybe it was better this way, with young girls in the house and him not being ^{her} ~~a~~ true-to-life husband. In any case, since there was no reduction in his before breakfast or after supper appetites, ^{he never heard her} ~~she didn't~~ complain.

It went on that way and might have stayed that way, except one ~~evening~~ evening, after supper, after Sethe, he came downstairs and lay on Baby Suggs bed and didn't want to be there.

He believed he was having house-fits, the ^{glassy} ~~deep~~ anger meⁿ some times feel when a woman's house begins to bind them, when they want to yell and break something or at least run off. He knew all about

that--felt it lots of time^s--in the Delaware weaver's house, for instance. But ~~za~~ always he associated the house-fit with the woman in it. This nervousness had nothing to do with the w^doman, whom he loved a little bit more each day: her hands among vegetables (~~sorting them, cleaning them, coring squash cutting kernels from ears of corn~~). Her mouth when she licked a thread end before guiding it through the needle or bit it in two when the seam was done. The blood in her eye when she defended her girls (and Beloved was hers now) or any colored woman from a slur. Also in this house-fit there was no anger, no suffocation, no yearning to be elsewhere. He just could not, would not, sleep upstairs or in the rocker or, now, in BabySuggs bed. So he went to the store room.

It went on that way and might have stayed that way except one evening, after supper, after Sethe he lay on a pallet in the store room and didn't want to be there. Then it was the cold room and it was out there, separated from the house itself, curled on top of two croker sacks full of sweet potatoes, staring at the sides of a lard can that he realized the moving was involuntary. He wasn't being nervous; he was being prevented.

Tk Tk

So he waited. Visited Sethe in the morning; slept in the cold room at night and waited.

She came, and he wanted to knock her down.

XXX

In Ohio seasons are theatrical. Each one enters like a prima donna, convinced its performance is the reason the world has people in it. When Paul D had been forced out of 124 into a shed behind it, summer had been hooted off stage and autumn with its bottles of blood and gold had everybody's attention. Even at night, when there should have been a restful intermission, there was none, because the ~~set~~ voices of a dying landscape were insistent. and loud.

TK "What you want in here ? What you want?"

"I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name." Paul D. never worried about his little tobacco tin anymore. It was rusted shut.. So while she hoisted ^t her skirts and turned her head over her shoulder the way the turtles had, he just looked at the lard can, silvery in moonlight, and spoke quietly.

"When good people take you in and treat you good, you ought to try to be good back. You don't...Sethe loves you. Much as her own. You know that."

Beloved dropped her skirts as he spoke and looked at him with empty eyes. She took a step he could not hear and stood close behind him.

"She don't love me nowhere near as much as I love her. I don't love nobody but her."

"Then what you come in here for?"

"I want you to touch me on the inside part."

"Go on back in that house and get to bed."

"Not ~~until~~ [#] you touch ~~me~~. On the inside part. And you have to call me my ~~name~~ [#]."

As long as ~~his~~ eyes were locked on the silver of the lard can he was safe. If he trembled like Lot's wife and felt some womanish need to see the nature of the ~~void~~ ^{SIN} behind him; feel a sympathy, perhaps, for the cursing curse ~~ed~~ ^I, or want to hold its ~~humanity~~ ^[humanity] in his arms out of respect for ~~the~~ ⁹ connection between them, he too would be lost..

"Call me my name."

"No."

"Please call it. I'll ~~leave~~ ^{go} if you call it."

"Beloved," ~~he~~ ^{it} said, but she did not go. She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper ~~of~~ ^{the} that flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave, he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached ~~to~~ the inside part he was saying "Red heart. Red ~~heart~~ ^{heart}" over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Sethe, then Denver, then Paul D himself. "Red heart. Red heart. Red heart!"

Preliminary typing of MSS.

2nd E.

3rd



Belmont

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