



## "2. Breathing..."

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2.

Breathing. How to do it so no one would know he was awake. Fake a deep rhythmic snore, drop the bottom lip. Most important the eyelids should not move and there must be a regular heartbeat and limp hands. At 2:00 a.m. when they checked to determine if he needed another immobilizing shot they would see the patient in room 17, sunk in a morphine sleep. If convinced, they might loosen his cuffs, ~~So~~ his hands could enjoy some blood. The trick of imitating semi-coma, like playing dead face down in a muddy kill zone, was to concentrate on a single neutral object. Something that would smother any random hint of life. Ice, he thought, a cube of it, an icicle or an ice-crust pond, or a frosted

landscape. No. Too much emotion attached to frozen hills. Fire, then? Never. Too active. He would need something that stirred no feelings, encouraged no memory—sweet or shameful. Just searching for such an item was agitating. Everything reminded him of something loaded with pain. Visualizing a blank sheet of paper drove his mind to the letter he had gotten—the one that had closed his throat: "Come fast. She be dead if you tarry." Finally, he settled on the chair in the corner of the room as his neutral object. Wood. Oak. Lacquered or stained. How many slats in its back? Was the seat flat or curved for a bottom? Hand crafted or machine made? If hand crafted who was the carpenter and where did he get his lumber? Hopeless. The chair was provoking questions not blank indifference. He would have to concentrate on something else, a night sky, starless or, better, train tracks. No scenery, no trains, just endless, endless tracks.

They had taken his shirt and laced boots but his pants and army jacket (neither an effective suicide instrument) were hanging

in the tiny closet. He just had to get down the hall to the exit door that was never locked after a fire broke out on that floor and a nurse and two patients died. That was the story Crane, the chatterbox orderly, rapidly chewing gum while washing the patient's armpits, had told him, but he believed it was simply convenient for the staff's smoke breaks.

Two days earlier, when he was handcuffed in the back seat of the patrol car, he had swerved his head wildly to see where he was and where he was going. Nothing in particular stood out except the flashing of an OK Diner display and a huge yard sign for a tiny church: AME Zion. If he succeeded in getting out that's where he would head: to Zion. Still, before escape, he would have to get shoes somehow, someday. Walking anywhere in winter without shoes would guarantee his being arrested and back in the ward until he could be sentenced for vagrancy. Interesting law, vagrancy, meaning standing outside or walking without purpose anywhere. Carrying a book would help, but being barefoot would



contradict "purposefulness" and seal a complaint of "loitering."

Better than most, he knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years and still men with or without badges but always <sup>with</sup> guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move—with or without shoes. Twenty years ago, as a four year old, he had a pair, though the sole of one flapped with every step.

Residents of fifteen houses had been ordered to leave their little neighborhood on the edge of town. Twenty-four hours, they were told, or else. "Else" meaning "die". In spite of the threats from men, both hooded and not, and pleadings from neighbors, one elderly man named Crawford<sup>\*</sup> refused to vacate. At the twenty-fourth hour he was beaten to death with clubs, rifle butts and tied to the oldest magnolia tree in the county—the one that grew in his own yard. Maybe it was loving that tree, which he said his great grandmother planted, that made him so stubborn. In the dark of

\* Stood barefoot on his porch and

night, some of the fleeing neighbors snuck back to untie him and bury him beneath his beloved magnolia.

*Although*  
~~So~~ shoes were vital. *for escape, he had none.*

Four a.m., before sunrise, he managed to loosen the canvas cuffs and unshackle himself. He put on his pants and jacket, crept *barefoot* down the hall. Except for the weeping from the room next to the exit, all was quiet—no squeak of an orderly's shoes, or smothered giggles and no smell of cigarette smoke. The hinges groaned when he opened the door and the cold hit him like a hammer.

The iced iron of the fire escape steps was so painful he jumped over the railing to sink his feet into the warmer snow on the ground. Maniac moonlight doing the work of absent stars, matched his desperate frenzy, lighting his hunched shoulders and footsteps left in the snow. Holding his collar tight at his throat, avoiding shoveled pavement for curb-snow, he ran the six blocks as quickly as hospital drug residue would let him to the parsonage of AME Zion, a small two-story clapboard. The steps to the porch

were thoroughly cleared of snow, but the house was dark. He knocked, hard, he thought, considering how stiff his hands were, but not threatening like the bam bam of a citizen's group, or a mob or the police. Insistence paid off; a light came on and the door opened a slit, revealing a gray-haired man in flannel robe, holding his glasses and frowning at the impudence of a pre-dawn visitor.

He wanted to say "Good evening," or his name, but his body shook violently like a victim of St. Vitus Dance and his teeth chattered so uncontrollably he could not make a sound. The man at the door took in the full measure of his shaking visitor, then stepped back to let him in.

"Jean! Jean!" He turned to direct his voice up the stairs before motioning the visitor inside. "Good Lord," he mumbled, pushing the door closed. "You a mess."

He tried to smile and failed.

"My name is Locke, Reverend John Locke. Yours?"



"Frank. Frank Money."

"You from down the street? At that hospital?"

Frank nodded while stamping his feet and trying to excite blood back into his fingers.

Reverend Locke grunted. "Have a seat," he said, then, shaking his head, added "You lucky, Mr. Money. They sell a lot of bodies out of there."

"Bodies?" Frank eased down to the sofa.

"Uh huh. To the medical school."

"Why would anybody pay for dead people?"

"Well, you know, doctors need to work on the dead poor so they can help the living rich."

"John, stop." Jean Locke came down the stairs tightening the belt of her robe. "That's just foolishness."



"This is my wife," said Locke. "And while she's sweet as honey, she's often wrong."

"Evening, ma'am. I'm sorry to..." Frank stood.

She cut him off. "No need for that. Keep your seat," she said and disappeared into the kitchen.

Frank did as told. Except for the absence of wind, the house was hardly less chilly than outside, and the plastic slipcovers stretched taught over the sofa did not help.

"How did you end up in the hospital instead of jail? That's where most barefoot, half-dressed folks go."

"The blood, probably. A lot of it running down my face."

"How'd it get there?"

"Wish I knew."

"You don't remember?"

"No. Just airplanes. Loud. Loud." Frank rubbed his forehead.

"I see." Reverend Locke stroked his chin. "Where you headed, brother?" Locke was still standing with one hand behind his back.

"Georgia."

"You don't say. That's quite a ways. Does Brother Money have any?" Locke smiled at his little wit.

"Had some when they picked me up," Frank answered, although he could not remember how much Lily had handed him. Just her turned down lips and unforgiving eyes.

"But it's gone now, right?" Locke squinted. "Police looking for you?"

"No." said Frank. "No, sir. They just hustled me up and put me in the crazy ward." He cupped his hands before his mouth and breathed on them. "I don't think they brought any charges."

"You wouldn't know it if they did."

Jean Locke returned with a basin of cold water. "Put your feet in here. It's cold but you don't want them to heat up too fast."

Frank sank his feet into the water, sighing "Thanks."

"What'd they get you for? The police." Locke asked.

What indeed. Other than that <sup>B52 engine</sup> roar, exactly what he was doing to attract police attention was beyond him. He couldn't explain it to himself, let alone someone else. Was he <sup>peeing on the sidewalk</sup> screaming? <sup>foul-mouthed curses</sup> Hollering at some passerby, some schoolchildren? Was he banging his head on a cement wall or hiding behind bushes in somebody's back yard? Or just wanting to?

"Acting up," he said. "Something like that." Perhaps he started a fight with a stranger or started weeping before trees—apologizing to them for acts he had never committed. (over)

"How long you been back?" Reverend Locke was still standing. His face softened.

Frank raised his head. "A year about. How'd you know?"

Locke shook his head and was about to speak when Jean came back with a cup and a plate of crackers. "It's just hot water with lots of salt in it," she said. "I'll get you a blanket."

Frank sipped and then gulped down the rest. When Jean brought him more, her husband said, "Jean, look and see what's in the poor box."

"He needs shoes, too, John."

There were none to spare, so they put four pair of socks and some ripped galoshes next to the sofa.



Soon as he left Lily's apartment, sanity left as well. Back was the free-floating rage, the self-loathing disguised as somebody else's fault. And <sup>the</sup> memory loss that had begun at Fort Hanson. No sooner than discharged he'd begun to wander. Where to go? Why?

"Get some sleep, brother. You got a rocky journey ahead and I don't just mean Georgia."

Frank fell asleep between a wool blanket and the plastic slipcovers and dreamed a terrible dream that ended in fire. He woke in sunlight to the smell of toast. It took a while, longer than it should have, to register where he was. The residue of two days' hospital drugging was leaving but slowly. Wherever he was, he was grateful the sun's dazzle did not hurt his head. He sat up and noticed socks folded neatly on the rug. <sup>like broken feet</sup> Then he heard murmurs <sup>^</sup> from another room. Staring at the socks, it all came into focus: the hospital escape, the freezing run, finally Reverend Locke. So he was ready, back in the real world when Locke came in and asked how four hours of sleep felt.

"Like heaven," said Frank.

Locke showed him to the bathroom and placed shaving kit and hairbrush on the sink edge. Shod and cleaned up, Frank sat down at the enamel-topped table and ate a breakfast of oatmeal

and over-buttered toast. In the center of the table lay three one-dollar bills and a wash of coins. It could have been a poker pot, except it seemed far more hard-won: dimes slipped from small coin purses; nickels reluctantly given up by children who had other (sweeter) plans for them; the dollar bills representing the generosity of a whole family.

"Seventeen dollars," said Locke. "That's more than enough for a bus ticket to Portland. It won't get you on the train to Georgia but when you get to Portland, here's what you do."

He instructed Frank to get in touch with a Reverend Jessie Maynard pastor of a Baptist church, and that he would call ahead and tell him to look out for another one.

"Another one?"

"Well, you not the first by a long shot. An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better."

Frank stared at him, but didn't say anything. There had been singing girls welcoming the shiploads of returning soldiers at Pier 91. And the army hadn't treated him so bad. It wasn't their fault he went ape every now and then. As a matter of fact the discharge doctors at Fort Lawton had been thoughtful and kind, telling him the craziness would leave in time. They knew all about it, but assured him it would pass. Just stay away from alcohol, they said. Which he didn't. Couldn't. Until he met Lily.

Locke handed Frank a flap torn from an envelope with Maynard's address and told him Maynard had a big congregation and could offer more help than his own small flock.

Jean had packed six cheese sandwiches and three oranges into a grocery bag, handed it to him along with a watch cap. Frank put on the cap, thanked her and, peering into the bag, asked, "How long a trip is it?"



"Don't matter," said Locke. "You'll be grateful for every bite since you won't be able to sit down at any bus stop counter. Come on, now. I'll drive you."

At the ticket window, Locke converted the coins into paper money and bought Frank's ticket. Standing in front of the *Trailways?* Greyhound's door, he turned to Reverend Locke and held out his hand. As the men shook hands they held each other's eyes, saying nothing and everything, as though 'goodbye' meant what it once did: God be with you.

There were very few passengers, yet Frank dutifully sat in the last seat, trying to shrink his 6' 3" body and holding the sandwich bag close. From the windows, through the fur of snow, the landscape became more melancholy when the sun successfully brightened the empty trees, the lonesome houses with little red wagons upside down in snow-mushed yards. Only the 1952 trucks looked alive. As he mused about what it might be like in those houses, he could imagine nothing at all. Again, as was almost

always the case when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune's teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. And he was stepping over them, around them to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own guts under that oh so thin sheet of flesh. They never went away, these pictures, or others even worse. Except with Lily. He chose not to think of this trip as a breakup. A pause, he hoped. Yet it was hard to ignore what <sup>living with</sup> keeping her company had become: a tired cruelty laced her voice and the buzz of her disappointment defined the silence. Yes, he sat sometimes for hours in it—numb, unwilling to talk. Yes, he regularly lost the few odd jobs he'd managed to secure. And while he once in a while couldn't bear to be near her, he was not at all sure he could live without her. It wasn't just the love-making—entering what he called the kingdom between her legs. Lying wide awake with the girl-weight of her arm on his chest,

the nightmares quieted and he could sleep a little. At dawn his first thought was not the welcome sting of whiskey. Most important, he was no longer attracted to other women—whether they were openly flirting, or on display for their own private pleasure. He didn't rank them against Lily; he simply saw them as people. Only with Lily, whom he'd left behind, had the pictures faded, moved behind a screen in his brain, yes, but waiting, waiting and accusing. Why didn't you help him? Pull him along the way you did Mike? And all that killing you did afterwards? Women running, dragging children along? And that old one-legged man on a crutch hobbling at the edge of the road so as not to slow down the other, swifter ones? You blew a hole in his head because <sup>you believed</sup> it would make up for the frosted urine on Mike's pants and avenge the lips calling mama. Did it? Did it work? And the girls. What did they ever do to you to deserve what you did to them? All unasked questions multiplying like mould in the shadows of the photographs he saw. Before Lily. Before seeing her stand on a chair, stretch, reach up to a high shelf



in her cupboard for <sup>the</sup> a can of Calumet she needed for the meal she was preparing for him. Their first. He should have jumped up, retrieved the can for her. But he did not. He could not take his eyes away from the backs of her knees. As she stretched, her dress of a soft cotton-y flowered fabric, rose up exposing that seldom seen, ooo so vulnerable flesh. And for a reason he still did not understand, he began to cry. Love, plain, simple and so fast it shattered him.

There was no love from Jessie Maynard. Help, yes. But the contempt was glacial. The Reverend was devoted to the needy, apparently, but only if they were properly clothed and not a young hale, 6'3" veteran. He kept Frank on the back porch near the driveway where a green Cadillac lurked, and smiled knowingly as he said, by way of apology, "My daughters are inside the house." It was an insult tax levied on the supplicant for an overcoat, sweater and five ten-dollar bills. With what was left from Zion's poor box, it was more than enough to get to Chicago. (over)



Anxiety about whether he would have another incident: uncontrollable, suspicious, destructive and illegal, was shrinking. It took a while, but now he could tell when a break was coming. The first time it happened—just after Fort Lawton—he was quiet, just sitting on a bus next to a brightly dressed woman. Her flowered skirt was a world's worth of color. Her blouse a loud red. Frank watched the flowers at the hem of her skirt blackening and her red blouse draining of color until it was white as milk. Then everybody, everything. Outside the window—trees, sky, a boy on a scooter, grass, hedges. All color gone like a black and white movie screen. He didn't yell then because he thought something bad was happening to his eyes. Bad, but fixable. He wondered if this was how dogs or cats or wolves saw the world. At the next stop he got off and walked toward a Chevron station, its black flames shooting out from the V. He wanted to get into the bathroom, look in the mirror to see if he had an eye infection, but the sign on the door stopped him. The sun hurt him. Its mean light drove him to look for

shade. Still he didn't shout, didn't smash anything, didn't accost strangers. That came later when the shame wouldn't stop nor the fury. Now, if the signs gave notice, he could tell when it started and hurry up and hide. Otherwise....

The Union Pacific glittered on the track flashing its colors with pride.

Signaled by a red cap, he entered a passenger car, pushed through the green separation curtain and found a window seat. The train's rocking and singing rails soothed him into a rare sleep that was so sound he missed the beginning of the mayhem, but not its end. He woke to the sobbing of a young woman being comforted by white-jacketed waiters. One of them nestled a pillow behind her head; another gave her a stack of linen napkins for her tears and the blood pouring from her nose. Next to her, looking away, was her silent, seething husband—his face a skull of shame and its partner, rigid anger.

When a <sup>waiter</sup> ~~porter~~ passed by, Frank touched his arm, asking

"What happened?"

"You didn't see that?"

"No. What was it?"

"That there is the husband. He got off at the stop to buy some cigarettes or something back there." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "The owner or customers or both kicked him out. Actually. Put their feet in his butt and knocked him down, kicked some more and when his lady came to help, she got a rock thrown in her face. We got them back in the car, but the crowd kept the yelling up till we pulled away. Look," he said. "See that?" He pointed to egg yolks, not sliding now but stuck like phlegm to the window.

"Anybody report to the conductor?" Frank asked him.

"You crazy?"

"Probably."



When dinner was served, steak, peas and mashed potatoes, Frank could not eat it.

The <sup>waiter</sup>porter, whose nameplate said Taylor, chuckled when he noticed the untouched food. "You want a shot? I got some Johnny Red in my case."

"Yeah. Oh, yeah."

Frank's taste buds, revolted by cheese sandwiches, oranges, or meat, came alive at the mention of whiskey. Just a shot. Just enough to settle and sweeten the world. No more.

The wait seemed long and just when Frank was convinced the <sup>waiter</sup>porter had forgotten, Taylor returned with a teacup, saucer and napkin. Johnny Red trembled invitingly in the thick white cup.

"Enjoy," said Taylor, then rocked along the aisle to the sway of the train.

The abused couple whispered to each other, she softly, pleadingly; he with urgency. He will beat her when they get home,



thought Frank. And who wouldn't? It's one thing to be publically humiliated. A man could move on from that. What was intolerable was the witness of a woman, a wife, who not only saw it, but had dared to try to rescue, rescue! him. He couldn't protect himself and he couldn't protect her either, as the rock in her face proved. She would have to pay for that bloody nose. Over and over again.

tk

By the time he stepped off the train he was calm enough, but the station noise was so abrasive, he reached for his side arm. It wasn't there, of course, so he leaned against a steel support until the panic died down enough to convince him he could endure the crowd.

Two hours later he was scooping up navy beans and buttering corn bread. Taylor, the <sup>waiter</sup>~~porter~~, had been right. Sookey's was not only a good and cheap place to eat, its company—diners, counter help, waitresses, loud cooks—was welcoming and high-spirited. Laborers and the idle, mothers and street women, all ate and drank

with the ease of family in their own kitchens. It was that quick, down home friendliness that led Frank to talk freely to the man on the stool next to his.

"Watson. Billy Watson." He held out his hand.

"Frank Money."

"Where you from, Frank?"

"Seattle. Georgia."

"You looking to settle here?"

"No. I'm headed on down to Georgia."

"Georgia?" The waitress shouted. "I got people in Macon.

No good memories about that place. We hid in an abandoned house for half a year."

"Hid from what?"

"The rent man."

"Why him?"

"Oh, please. It was 1938."

Up and down the counter there was laughter. Knowing laughter that defended, protected and strengthened.

Billy Watson invited Frank to his house. "Stay over. Meet my family. You can't leave tonight anyway."

✓  
"True," said Frank.

"I'll get you to the station on my way to work. You taking a <sup>tomorrow.</sup>  
↑  
bus south or the train? Bus is cheaper."

they got Randolph's  
BSCP  
"Train, Billy. Long as <sup>^</sup>there're porters, that's the way I want to travel."

"They make good money nowadays. Four hundred, five a month. Plus tips."

Tk

Billy's son, Thomas, raised his good arm to shake hands. The other arm sagged at his side.



When, later, Frank asked what happened to his son's arm, Buddy arranged his hands in rifle position. "Drive by cop," he said.

"He had a cap pistol. Eight years old, running up and down the sidewalk pointing it. Some red neck rookie thought his dick was under appreciated by his brother cops."

"You can't just shoot a kid," said Frank.

"In Chicago? Man, we lucky to be alive. Besides, the bad arm kept him off the streets and in the class room. He's a math wiz. Wins competitions all over. Scholarships pouring in."

"So the boy cop did him a favor."

"No. No, no, no. Jesus stepped in and did that. He said, 'Hold on there Mr. Police Guy. Don't hurt the least of mine. He who harms the least of mine disturbs the tranquility of my mind.'"

Beautiful, thought Frank. Bible stuff works every time every place—<sup>except</sup> outside the fire zone, ~~that is~~. "Jesus. Jesus!" That's what

Mike said. Red yelled it too. "Jesus, God Almighty, I'm fucked, Frank, Jesus, help me."

Tk

The math wiz had no objection to sleeping on the sofa and letting his father's new friend have his bed. Settling down into darkness shaped by the street lit edges of the window shades, <sup>in the absence of Lily</sup> Frank hoped sobriety would not subject him to those same awful, waking dreams. Sleep came finally but a few hours into it, he woke to the sound of a click like the pull of a trigger from a gun minus ammo. Frank sat up. Nothing stirred. Then the outline of a small man in a wide-brimmed hat appeared outlined by the frame of light at the window. Frank reached for the bedside lamp. Its glow revealed a little sad-faced man in a light blue zoot suit. "Hey! Who the hell are you? What you want?" Frank stood and moved <sup>cautiously</sup> toward the figure. Three steps toward him, the zoot suit man disappeared.

Frank went back to bed, thinking the sighting was not all that bad, compared to others he'd had. No guts, no dogs or birds eating the remains of his friends. This one, a strange little man, was comic, in a way. He had heard about those suits, but never saw anybody wearing one. If cartoon was the medium and manhood was the message he would have preferred a loincloth and some white paint artfully smeared on forehead and cheeks. Holding a spear, of course. But the zoot suiters chose another costume: wide shoulders, wide brimmed hats, watch chains, pants ballooned up from narrow cuffs to a chest high waist.

tk

Scenery

Recommend  
B&B  
→



3.

MAMA WAS PREGNANT WHEN WE WALKED OUT OF BANDERA COUNTY, TEXAS. THREE OR MAYBE FOUR FAMILIES HAD TRUCKS OR CARS AND LOADED ALL THEY COULD. BUT THEY COULDN'T LOAD THEIR LAND, THEIR CROPS. <sup>their stock</sup> IT WAS A LONG TIME BEFORE THE SMELL OF ~~OUR~~ BURNED DOWN HOUSES DISAPPEARED. MOST FAMILIES, LIKE MINE, WALKED FOR MILES UNTIL MR. GARDENER CAME BACK FOR US AFTER DROPPING HIS <sup>OWN</sup> PEOPLE AT THE STATE LINE. HE TOOK US A DISTANCE AND THEN WE WALKED SOME MORE. MY SHOE SOLE FLAPPED UNTIL PAPA TIED IT UP WITH HIS OWN SHOE LACE. TALK ABOUT TIRED. TALK ABOUT HUNGRY. I HAVE EATEN TRASH IN JAIL, KOREA, HOSPITALS, AT TABLE AND FROM CERTAIN GARBAGE CANS. NOTHING, HOWEVER,

COMPARES TO THE FOOD LEAVINGS AT PANTRIES. WRITE  
ABOUT THAT, WHY DON'T YOU? YOU GOT ANY NOTION OF  
WHAT IT'S LIKE TRYING TO GET SOMETHING TO EAT WALKING  
FOR DAYS AND NIGHTS DOWN A COUNTRY ROAD? HAPPY  
TO BE OFFERED THE LEFTOVERS OF A FOOD PANTRY? I  
REMEMBER STANDING IN LINE AT CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER  
WAITING FOR A TIN PLATE OF DRY, CRACKED CHEESE  
ALREADY SHOWING GREEN, PICKLED PIGS' FEET—ITS VINEGAR  
SOAKING STALE WHITE BREAD.

*Biscuits*

IT WAS THERE AT THAT CHURCH THAT MAMA HEARD THE  
WOMAN AHEAD OF HER EXPLAIN TO THE VOLUNTEER HOW  
TO SPELL AND PRONOUNCE HER NAME. MAMA SAID IT WAS  
THE SWEETEST THING AND THE SOUND OF THE NAME WAS  
LIKE MUSIC AMIDST THE ARGUE AND HEAT OF THE CROWD. X  
WEEKS LATER WHEN HER BABY, DELIVERED ON A MATTRESS IN  
REVEREND BAILEY'S CHURCH BASEMENT, TURNED OUT TO BE  
A GIRL MAMA NAMED HER YCIDRA, TAKING CARE TO

PRONOUNCE ALL THREE SYLLABLES. OF COURSE, SHE WAITED THE NINE DAYS BEFORE NAMING, LEST DEATH NOTICED FRESH LIFE AND ATE IT. EVERYBODY BUT MAMA CALLS HER 'CEE'. I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WAS NICE, HOW SHE THOUGHT ABOUT THE NAME, TREASURED IT. AS FOR ME, NO SUCH MEMORIES. I AM NAMED FRANK AFTER MY FATHER'S BROTHER. LUTHER IS MY FATHER'S NAME; IDA MY MOTHER'S. THE CRAZY PART IS OUR LAST NAME. MONEY. OF WHICH WE HAD NONE.



4.

A mean grandmother is one of the worst things a girl could have. Mamas are supposed to spank and rule you so you grow up knowing right from wrong. Grandmothers, even when they've been hard on their own children, are forgiving and generous to the grandchildren. Ain't that so?

Cee stood up in the zinc tub and took a few dripping steps to the stove where a kettle of hot water hissed. She poured it into the

cooling tub water and sat back down in it. She wanted to linger in water while a softly suffering afternoon light encouraged her thoughts to tumble. Regrets, excuses, righteousness, false memory and future plans mixed together or stood like soldiers in line. Well, that's the way grandmothers should be, she thought, but for little Ycidra Money it wasn't like that at all. Because Mama and Papa worked from before sunrise until dark, they never knew that Miss Noella poured water instead of milk over the shredded wheat Cee and her brother ate for breakfast. Nor that when they had stripes and welts on their legs they were cautioned to lie, to say they got them by playing out by the stream where brambles and huckleberry thorns grew. Even grandfather Salem was silent. Frank said it was because he was scared Miss Noella would leave him the way his first two wives did. Noella, who had collected a five hundred dollar life insurance payment upon her first husband's death, was a serious catch for an old, unemployable man. Besides, she had a 1939 Ford and owned her house. She was so valuable to Salem

Money he never made a sound when the salt pork was halved for the two of them and all the children got was its flavor. Of course, the grandparents were doing them a big favor letting some homeless relatives live in their house after the family got run out of Texas. She herself was born on the road, which Noella took as a very bad sign for the ~~new~~ baby's future. Decent women, she said, delivered babies at home, in a bed attended to by good Christian women who knew what to do. Although only whores went to hospitals, at least they had a roof overhead when their baby came. Being born in the street, or the gutter as she sometimes put it, was prelude to a sinful, worthless life.

The house was big enough for two, maybe three, but not for grandparents plus Papa, Mama, Uncle Frank, and two children—one a howling baby. Over the years, the discomfort of the crowded house increased, and Noella, who believed herself superior to everybody else in Lotus, chose to focus her resentment on the little girl born 'in the street.' A frown in every glance when



she entered, the lips turned down at every drop of a spoon, trip on the door sill, loosening braid. Most of all, the murmur of "gutter child," as she walked away from a failing that was always on display with her granddaughter. During those years Cee slept with her parents on the floor, a thin pallet hardly better than the pine slats underneath. Uncle Frank used two chairs put together; young Frank slept on the back porch, on the slant-y wooden swing, even when it rained. Her parents, Luther and Ida, worked two jobs each—Ida picking cotton in the day and sweeping the lumber sheds in the evening. Luther and Uncle Frank were field workers for Jeffery planters and very happy to have jobs since most of the young men over there had enlisted in the war and when it was over didn't come back to work cotton or lumber. Then Uncle Frank enlisted too. He got in the navy as a cook and glad about that because he didn't have to handle explosives. But his ship sank anyway and Miss Noella hung the Gold star in the window as though she, and not one of Salem's ex-wives, was the honorable

*patriotic*  
1

mother who had lost a son. Ida's job at the lumber yard gave her a lethal asthma but it paid off because at the end of those three years with Noella they were able to rent a place from Old Man Shepherd who drove in from Jeffrey every Saturday morning to collect the rent.

Cee remembered the relief and the pride they all took having their own garden and their own laying hens. She remembered everybody, except Noella, as stern but open-handed. A stranger coming through was welcomed even, or especially, if he was running from the law. Like that man, bloody and scared, that they cleaned up, fed and led away on a mule. It was nice having their own house. There they could let Mr. Haywood put them on his monthly list of people who needed supplies from the general store in Jeffrey. Sometimes he would bring back <sup>comic books,</sup> chewing gum and mint balls, free, for the children. Jeffrey had the sidewalks, running water, stores, post office, a bank and a school. Lotus was separate, with no sidewalks or indoor plumbing, just houses and

two churches, one of which churchwomen used for teaching reading and arithmetic. Cee thought it would have been better if there were more books to read—not just Grimm’s Fairy Tales, and a book of Bible passages for young people.

That, she believed, was the reason she married a rat. If she hadn’t been so ignorant living in a no-count, not-even-a-town, place with only chores, church, and nothing else to do, she would have known better. Watched, watched, watched by every grown up from sunrise to sunset and ordered about by not only Noella but every adult in town. Come here, girl, don’t you know how to sew? Yes mam. Then why is your hem hanging like that? Yes, mam. I mean no Mam. Is that lipstick on your mouth? No mam. What then? Cherries, mam, I ate some....Cherries, my foot. Wipe your mouth. Come down from that tree, you hear me? Tie your shoes, put down that rag doll and pick up a broom, uncross your legs go weed that garden don’t you talk back to me. When Cee and a few other girls reached fourteen and started talking about boys, she



was prevented from any real flirtation because of her big brother, Frank. The boys knew she was off limits because of him. That's why when Frank reached eighteen, enlisted and left town, she fell for what Noella called the first thing she saw wearing <sup>belted</sup> trousers <sub>1</sub> instead of overalls.

His name was Principal but he called himself Prince. A visitor from Atlanta to his aunt's house, he was a good-looking new face with two-toned, thin-soled shoes. All the girls were impressed with his big city accent and what they believed was his knowledge and experience. Cee most of all.

Now, splashing water on her shoulders, she wondered for the umpteenth time why she didn't at least ask the aunt he was visiting why he was sent to the backwoods instead of spending the winter in the big, bad city. But feeling the space where her brother had been, she had no defense. That's the other side, she thought, of having a smart, tough brother close at hand to take care of and protect you—you are slow to develop your own brain muscle.

Besides, Prince loved himself so deeply, so completely, it was impossible to doubt his conviction. So if Prince said she was pretty, she believed him. If he said at fourteen she was a woman, she believed that too. And if he said I want you for myself, it was Noella who said, "Not unless y'all are legal." Whatever legal meant. Ycidra didn't even have a birth certificate and the courthouse was over a hundred miles away. So they had Reverend Pike come over and bless them, write their names in a huge book before walking back to her parents' house. Frank had enlisted so his bed was where they slept and where the great thing people warned or giggled about took place. It was not so much painful as dull. Cee thought it would get better later. Better turned out to be simply more and while the quantity increased, its pleasure lay in its brevity.

There was no job in or around Lotus Prince allowed was good enough for him, so he took her to Atlanta. Cee looked forward to an exciting life in the city and when, after a few weeks

of ogling at water coming from the turn of a spigot, inside toilets free of flies, street lights shining more regularly than the sun and as lovely as fireflies, women in high heels and gorgeous hats trotting to church two, sometimes three times a day—following the grateful joy of the pretty dress Prince bought her and weeks of dumbfounded delight, she learned that Principal had married her for an automobile.

Noella had bought a used station wagon from Shepherd the rent man and, since Salem couldn't drive, Noella gave her old 1939 Ford to Luther and Ida—with the caution that they give it back if the station wagon broke down. A few times Luther let Prince use the Ford on errands: trips to the post office in Jeffrey for mail to or from wherever Frank was stationed, first Kentucky, then Korea. Once he drove to town for throat medicine for Ida when her breathing problems got worse. Having easy access to the Ford suited everyone because Prince washed away the eternal road dust that floured it; changed plugs, oil and never gave lifts to the boys



who begged to join him in the car. It was natural for Luther to agree to let the couple drive it to Atlanta, since they promised to return it in a few weeks.

Never happened.

She was all alone now, sitting in a zinc tub defying heat with warm water while Prince was cruising around with his two-tone shoes pressing the gas pedal in Chicago or New York, for all she knew. When Prince left her to her own devices, Cee rented a cheaper room on a quiet street, a room with kitchen privileges and use of a washing machine. Thelma, who lived upstairs, became a friend and helped her get a job dishwashing at Bobby's Rib House fusing the friendship with blunt counsel.

"No fool, like a country fool. Why don't you go back to your folks?"

"Without the car?" Lord, thought Cee. Noella might have her arrested.

Ycidra agreed with Thelma about her foolishness, but more than anything she wanted desperately to talk to her brother. Her letters to him were about weather and Lotus gossip. Devious. But she knew that if she could see him, tell him, he would not laugh at her, quarrel, or condemn. He would, as always, protect her from a bad situation. Like the time he, Mike and some other boys were playing softball in a field. Cee sat nearby, leaning on a butternut tree. The boys' game bored her. She glanced at the players intermittently, focused intently on the cherry red polish she was picking from her nails, hoping to remove it all before Noella could berate her for 'flaunting' her little hussy self. She looked up and saw Frank leaving the mound with his bat only because others were yelling. "Where you going, man?" "Hey, hey. You out?" He walked slowly away from the field and disappeared into the surrounding trees. Circling, she later learned. Suddenly he was behind the tree she leaned against swinging his bat twice into the legs of a man she had not even noticed standing behind the tree.

Mike and the others ran to see what she had not. Then they all ran, Frank dragging her by the arm—not even looking back. She had questions: “What happened? Who was that?” The boys didn’t answer. They simply muttered curses. Hours later, Frank explained. The man wasn’t from Lotus, he told her, and had been hiding behind the tree flashing her. When she pressed her brother to define “flashing”, and he did so, Cee began to tremble. Frank put one hand on top of her head, the other at her nape. His fingers, like balm, stopped the trembling and the chill that accompanied it. She followed Frank’s advice always: recognized poisonous berries, learned to shout when in snake territory, the medicinal uses of spider webs. His instructions were specific, his cautions clear.

But he never warned her about rats.

Four barnyard swallows gathered on the lawn below. Politely equidistant from each other they peck-searched through blades of drying grass. Then, as if summoned, all four flew up in a tk tree.



The quiet seemed to slither, then boom. Its weight more theatrical than noise. It was like the quiet of the Lotus house afternoon and evening as she and her brother figured out what to eat, do or talk about. Their parents worked sixteen hours and were hardly there. So they invented escapades, or investigated surrounding territory. Even when Frank was with friends, Mike and Stuff, he let her tag along. Cee, towel-wrapped, went to the window and raised it to just below the place where the screen was torn, remembering how unwelcome drop-in visits to her grandparents' house were, unless Noella needed them for chores. Salem was uninspiring since he was mute about everything except his meals. His enthusiasm was playing checkers with some other old men. Parents were so beat by the time they came home from work, any affection they showed was like a razor—sharp, short and thin. Noella was the wicked witch. Frank and Cee, like some forgotten Hansel and Gretel, locked hands as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future.

Standing at the window wrapped in a scratchy towel, Cee felt her heart breaking. If Frank were there he would once more touch the back of her neck with four fingers, or stroke her nape with his thumb. Don't cry, said the fingers; the welts will disappear. Don't cry; Mama is tired; she didn't mean it. Don't cry, don't cry girl; I'm right here. But he wasn't there or anywhere near. In the photograph he'd sent home, a smiling warrior in a uniform holding a rifle, he looked as though he belonged to something else, something beyond and unlike Georgia. Months after he was discharged, he sent a two-cent postcard to say where he lived. Cee wrote back:

Hello brother how are you I am fine. I got <sup>me</sup> a ok job in a restaurant but looking for a better one. Write back when you can  
Sincerely

Now she stood, alone, her body already throwing off the good the tub soak had done and beginning to sweat. She toweled the damp under her breasts then wiped perspiration from her

forehead. The swallows were back bringing with them a light breeze and an odor of sage growing at the edge of the yard. Cee watched, thinking, so this is what they mean in those sad, sweet songs. 'When I lost my baby I almost lost my mind....' Except the songs were about lost love. What she felt was worse than that. It was a heavy coat worn not over the skin but under. It was hard to carry its hidden weight but worth it since everything inside was buttoned up and still.

Cooled, finally, she unhooked the dress Principal had bought her their second day in Atlanta. Its rayon-silky touch still pleased her as did its riot of blue dahlias on a white background. Once dressed, she dragged the tub through the kitchen and out the back door. Slowly, carefully she rationed the bath water onto the wilted grass; a half bucketful here, a little more there, taking care to let her feet but not her dress get wet.

Gnats buzzed over a bowl of black grapes on the kitchen table. Cee waved them away, rinsed the fruit and sat down to



munch them while she thought about her situation: today was Monday; she had six dollars; rent due at month's end was twice that. Next Friday she was to be paid eight dollars. So, fifteen dollars total, minus twelve, left her three dollars for everything else: shoe repair, bus fare, sanitary napkins, a fifteen cent movie in a balcony seat. Fortunately on her job she could eat for free. Solution: more work—a second job or another one.

For that, she needed to see Thelma, her upstairs neighbor. Without knocking Cee opened the door and found her friend rinsing dishes at the sink.

"I saw you out there. You think sloshing dirty water is going to green up that yard?"

"Can't hurt."

"Yes, it can." Thelma wiped her hands. "Mosquitoes be doing their blood dance the whole night long. All they need is a smell of water."

"Sorry."

"I don't doubt that." Thelma patted her apron pocket for a pack of Camels. Lighting one, she eyed her friend. "That's a pretty dress. Where'd you get it?" They both moved to the living room and plopped down on the sofa.

"Prince bought it for me when we first moved here."

"Prince." Thelma snorted. "You mean Frog. I've seen no-  
counts by the truckload. Never saw anybody more useless than  
him. Do you even know where he is?"

"No."

"You want to?"

"No."

"Well thank the Lord for that."

"I need a job, Thelma."

"You got one. Don't tell me you quit Bobby's?"

"No. But I need something better. Better paying. After I pay the rent I have to eat at the restaurant, whether I want to or not."

"Bobby's food is the best. You can't eat anywhere better."

"I know, but I need a real job where I can save. And no, I'm not going back to Lotus."

"Can't fault you for that. Your family is crazy."

"Mean, maybe. Not crazy."

"Oh yeah? Named you Ycidra. That is mean."

"Thelma?" Cee rested her elbows on her knees and turned pleading eyes to her friend. "Please?"

"Ok. Ok. Well, you just might be in luck. Just so happens I heard about something couple weeks ago when I was in the beauty shop."

"What?"



"A couple—they live somewhere just outside the city—they need a second."

"A second what?"

"They got a cook-housekeeper, but they want a maid-type person to help the husband. He's a doctor. Nice people."

"You mean like a nurse?"

"No. A helper. I don't know. Bandages and iodine I guess. His office is in the house, the woman said. So you'd live in. She said the pay was good as any, but since it was rent free, that made all the difference."

The walk from the bus stop was a long one made longer by Cee's white, high-heeled shoes. She carried a shopping bag and hoped she looked respectable in this beautiful, quiet neighborhood. The address of Doctor and Mrs. Scott revealed a large two-story house rising above a <sup>church-</sup>rigidly neat lawn. Cee didn't know whether to knock on the front door or look for one at the back. She chose the

latter. A stout, white-haired woman opened the kitchen door. Reaching for Cee's shopping bag, she smiled. "Step on in. The doctor's wife will see you shortly. My name is Sarah. Sarah Williams."

"Thank you. Can I take off these shoes for a second?"

Sarah laughed. "Who ever invented high heels won't be happy till they cripple us. Sit down. Let me give you a cold root beer."

Barefoot, Cee marveled at the kitchen—much, much bigger and better equipped than the one at Bobby's. Cleaner, too. After a few swallows of root beer, she asked Sarah, "Can you tell me what-all I have to do?"

"Mrs. Scott will tell you some, but the doctor himself is the only one who really knows."

After a bathroom freshening, Cee put her shoes back on and followed Sarah into a living room that seemed to her more beautiful

than a movie house. Cool air, plum colored velvet furniture, filtered light through heavy laced curtains. Mrs. Scott, her hands resting on a tiny pillow, her ankles crossed, <sup>with a forefinger</sup> nodded and invited Cee to sit.  
^

"Cee, is it?" Her voice was like music.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Born here? Atlanta?"

"No. Ma'am. I'm from a little place west of here, called Lotus."

"Any children?"

"No, Ma'am."

"Married?"

"No, Ma'am."

"What church affiliation? Any?"

"There's Assembly of God in Lotus but, I..."

"They jump around?"



"Ma'am?"

"Never mind. You will be assisting the doctor, you know. Did you graduate from high school?"

"No, ma'am."

"Can you read?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Count?"

Oh, yes. I worked a cash register."

"That's not what I asked you."

"I can count ma'am."

"You may not need to. I don't really understand or care to my husband's work. He is more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments. Sarah will show you to your room."

new  
Back in the kitchen, Cee saw that her shopping bag had been removed and Sarah was urging her to have something to eat before settling in. She opened the refrigerator and selected a bowl of potato salad and two fried chicken thighs.

"You want me to warm up the chicken?"

"No, ma'am. I like it just so."

Cee was surprised by her hunger. Being an habitual light eater, and surrounded by hot meat sizzling in Bobby's kitchen, she was normally indifferent to food. Now she wondered if two pieces of chicken could even begin to dampen her appetite.

"How did it go, your meeting with Mrs. Scott?" asked Sarah.

"Fine," said Cee. "She's nice. Real nice."

→  
"She tell you anything about what your work here is?"

2 "Ooo. This is nice. Look, a little desk." Cee gazed at the bed's headboard ~~and~~ <sup>then</sup> touched it with a smile. A small ~~carpet~~ <sup>rug</sup> lay ~~at its~~ side on the floor next to the bed. Behind a folding screen were a toilet and a sink.

~~Cee sat on the bed.~~

"Glad it pleases you. But don't show too much happiness. Laughter is frowned on here."

"Why is that?"

"Tell you later."

"No. Now, please?"

"Well remember those children I mentioned being away? They're in a home. They both have great big heads. Cephalitis, I think they call it. Sad for even one, but two? Have mercy."

"Oh" said Cee







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<sup>Bean</sup>  
Dr. Scott was formal but welcoming. He  
<sup>know</sup>  
only wanted to if she had children or had been  
<sup>^</sup>  
with a man. Cee told him she was married for a  
spell, but had not gotten pregnant. He seemed  
pleased to hear it. Her duties, he said, <sup>✓</sup>Were  
primarily cleaning instruments and equipment,  
tidying, and keeping a schedule of patients'  
names, times of appointments and so on. <sup>He</sup> ~~Dr. Scott~~  
did his own billing in his office, which was  
separate from the examination/laboratory room.

"Be here promptly at 10:00 in the morning,  
and be prepared to work late if the situation calls  
for it. Also, be prepared for the reality of  
medicine: sometimes blood and sometimes pain.  
You will have to be steady and calm. Always.  
Can you do that?"

"Yes, sir. I can. I sure can."

And she did. Her admiration for the doctor grew even more when she noticed how many more poor people—women and girls, especially, he helped. Far more than well-to-do ones from the neighborhood or in Atlanta proper. He was extremely careful with his patients, observing their privacy, except when he invited another doctor to join him in working on a patient. Cee loved her work: the beautiful house, the kind doctor, and the wages—never skipped or short as they sometimes were at Bobby's. She saw virtually nothing of Mrs. Scott. Sarah, who took care of all her needs, said the lady of the house had a tiny laudanum craving and spent much of her time at home reading or watching television shows. Dobie Gillis and the Honeymooners were her favorites. She



had tried I Love Lucy, but hated Ricky Ricardo too much to watch it.

For Cee, Sarah was her family, her friend and her confidante. They shared every meal <sup>together</sup> together. When it was too hot in the kitchen, they ate in the backyard under a canopy, smelling the last of the lilacs and watching the flick of tiny lizards across the walkway.

"Let's go in," said Sarah. "The flies are too much today. Besides I have some honey dew's need eating before they soften."

In the kitchen, Sarah lifted three melons from a wooden tray. She caressed on <sup>^</sup>slowly, then another. "Males," she snorted.

Cee picked up and stroked the third. <sup>lime yellow peel of the</sup>  
Tucking her forefinger into the <sup>tiny</sup> ~~deep~~ indentation at <sup>^</sup>

On the morning of her first work day, Cee was in Dr. Beau's office before he was. She glanced in awe at his bookshelves, running her finger over the titles: TK

How small <sup>useless</sup> was her <sup>schooning</sup> ~~education~~; She would to read <sup>about</sup> and understand "eugenics" and TK

the stem break, she laughed. "Female," she  
*said.*  
shouted.

"Ah, hallelujah." Sarah joined Cee's laugh.

"Always the sweetest."

"Always the juiciest," echoed Cee.

"Can't beat her for sugar."

"Can't beat her for juice."

Sarah slid a long knife from a drawer and  
with intense anticipation, cut the girl in two.





5.

WOMEN ARE EAGER TO TALK TO ME WHEN THEY HEAR MY LAST NAME. MONEY? THEY CHUCKLE AND ASK THE SAME QUESTION: WHO NAMED ME THAT OR IF ANYBODY DID. IF I MADE IT UP TO MAKE MYSELF FEEL IMPORTANT OR WAS I A GAMBLER OR THIEF OR SOME OTHER KIND OF CROOK THEY SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR? WHEN I TELL THEM MY WHOLE NAME, FIRST AND LAST, THEY SCREAM WITH LAUGHTER AND SAY: THERE AIN'T NO SUCH THING. ALL MONEY IS FAKE. NO END OF PLEASANT TALK AFTER THAT AND IT'S ENOUGH TO KEEP OUR FRIENDSHIP GOING WAY AFTER IT'S DRIED UP JUST SO THEY CAN MAKE LAME JOKES: HEY, MONEY, HOW YOU MAKING IT? HEY, MONEY! GOT SOME? MONEY, COME ON OVER HERE. YOU OWE ME.

TRUTHFULLY, OTHER THAN A FEW QUICK OPPORTUNITIES, I'VE KNOWN ONLY FOUR WOMEN. THREE OF THEM WERE

SERIOUS RELATIONSHIPS AND I LIKED THE SMALL BREAKABLE  
THING INSIDE EACH ONE. WHATEVER THEIR PERSONALITY,  
SMARTS OR LOOKS, SOMETHING SOFT LAY INSIDE EACH. LIKE  
A BIRD'S BREASTBONE, SHAPED AND CHOSEN TO WISH ON.  
A LITTLE V, THINNER THAN BONE AND BARELY HINGED, THAT I  
COULD BREAK WITH A FOREFINGER IF I WANTED TO, BUT  
NEVER DID. WANT TO, I MEAN. KNOWING IT WAS THERE,  
HIDING FROM ME, WAS ENOUGH.

IT WAS THE FOURTH WOMAN WHO CHANGED  
EVERYTHING. IN HER COMPANY THE LITTLE WISHBONE V  
TOOK UP RESIDENCE IN MY OWN CHEST AND MADE ITSELF AT  
HOME. IT WAS HER FOREFINGER THAT SCARED ME AND IF IT  
WASN'T FOR THAT LETTER, I'D STILL BE HANGING FROM HER  
APRON STRINGS. SHE HAD NO COMPETITION EXCEPT FOR THE  
HORSES, A MAN'S FOOT AND YCIDRA TREMBLING UNDER MY  
ARM.

GOT THAT?



6.

The actors were nicer than the actresses. At least they called her by her name and didn't mind if their costume was off or a bit stained. The women called her 'girl', as in "Where's the girl?"

"Girl, where's my Pond's cleanser?" Plus they had fits if their costumes weren't perfect.

Lily's resentment was mild because seamstress/wardrobe was a financial promotion from cleaning woman and she got to show off the sewing skills her mother had taught her: slip stitch, blanket stitch, chain, back, yo-yo, shank button and flat. In addition, Ray Stone, the director, was polite to her. He produced two sometimes three plays a season at the Skylight Studio and taught acting classes the rest of the time. So, small and poor as it was, the theater was as busy as a hive all year. In between productions and after classes, the place hummed with intense argument and sweat misted the foreheads of Mr. Stone and his students. Lily thought they were more animated then than on stage. She couldn't help overhearing these quarrels, but she didn't understand anger that wasn't about a scene or how to say some lines. Now that the Skylight was shut, Mr. Stone arrested, and she out of a job it was clear she should have listened closely.

It must have been the play. The one that caused the problem, the picketing, then the visit from two government men in snap brim hats.

tk

The pay was less at Wang's Heavenly Palace Dry Cleaners and there were no tips from actors. Yet working in daylight was an improvement over walking in darkness to get to and from the theater. Lily stood in the press room, her irritation blossoming into anger. The response she had gotten from the real estate agent had her seething. Frugal and minding her own business, she had added enough to what her parents' left her to put a down payment on a house. Searching through ads didn't help so she consulted a real estate agent. When she described her purpose and the neighborhood she preferred, the agent smiled and said, "I'm really sorry."

"These are sold already?" Lily asked.

The agent dropped her eyes then decided not to lie. "Well, no, but there are restrictions."

"On what?"

The agent sighed. Obviously not wanting to have this conversation, she lifted her desk blotter and pulled out some stapled papers. Turning a page, she showed Lily an underlined passage. Lily traced the lines of print with her forefinger:

NO PART OF SAID PROPERTY HEREBY CONVEYED SHALL  
EVER BE USED OR OCCUPIED BY ANY HEBREW OR BY AN  
PERSON OF THE ETHIOPIAN, MALAY, OR ASIATIC RACE  
EXCEPTING ONLY EMPLOYEES IN DOMESTIC SERVICE.

"I've got rentals and apartments in another part of the city.  
Would you like...."



"Thank you," said Lily and left the office as quickly as pride let her. Nevertheless, when her anger cooled and after some mulling, she returned to the agency and rented a second floor, one bedroom apartment near Jackson Street.

Although her employers were far more considerate than the actresses at Skylight Studio, after six months of pressing and steaming for the Wang's, and even after she was renting a large apartment instead of a room, she was feeling restless. Into that boredom came a tall man with a bundle of army issue clothes for same day service. The Wang couple, at lunch in the back room, left Lily to attend the counter. She told the customer that same day service applied only if requests were made before noon. He could pick his things up the next day. She smiled when she spoke. He did not return the smile but his eyes had such a quiet, far away look—like people who made their living staring at mountain tops or oceans—she relented. "Well, I'll see what I can do. Come back at 5:30." He did and, holding the clothes hangers over his shoulder,

waited on the sidewalk until she came out. Then he offered to walk her home.

They slid into each other.

So when he said he had to leave for family reasons Lily felt one abnormal pulse beat. That was all.

Life with Frank had been glorious at first. Its break down was more of a stutter than a single eruption. She had forgiven much: like the time they went to a church convention held in a high school stadium. Known more for table after table of delicious free food than proselytizing, the church welcomed everybody. And everybody came—not only members of the congregation. The non-believers, lined up the entrance, out numbered them. Literature passed out by serious-looking young people and sweet-faced elders was stuffed into purses and side pockets. When the morning rain stopped and soft light sweetened the sky, Lily and Frank exchanged their slickers for sweaters and strolled hand in hand to the stadium. They were in good spirits all afternoon—chatting with people and

helping children load their plates. Then smack in the middle of all then sunlight and gaiety, he bolted. They had been standing at a table, piling seconds of fried chicken on their plates, when a little girl with slant-y eyes reached up over the table edge to grab a cupcake. Frank leaned over to push the platter closer to her. When she gave him a broad smile of thanks he dropped his food and ran through the crowd. People parted before him—some with frowns others simply agape. Alarmed and embarrassed, Lily put down her paper plate. Trying hard to pretend he was a stranger to her, she walked slowly, her chin up, making no eye contact, past the bleachers and away from the exit Frank had taken.

When she returned to the apartment, she found it, thankfully, empty. How could he change so quickly? Laughing one second, terrified the next? Is there some violence in him that could be directed toward her? He had moods, of course, but was never argumentative or the least threatening. Lily drew up her knees and, leaning on them, pondered her confusion and his; the future



she wanted and the question of whether he could share it. Dawn light seeped through the curtains before he returned. Lily's heart jumped when she heard the key turn in the lock, but he was calm and, as he put it 'beat up with shame.'

"Did it have something to do with your time in Korea that spooked you?"

Frank smiled. "My time?"

"Well, you know what I mean."

"Yeah, I know. It won't happen again. Promise." Frank enclosed her in his arms.

Things went back to normal. He worked at a car wash in the afternoons; she at Wang's weekdays and doing alterations on Saturdays. They did less socializing but Lily didn't miss it. The occasional movie was enough until they sat through "He Ran All the Way." Afterwards Frank spent much of the night clenching his fist in silence. There were no more movies.



Lily's sights were set elsewhere. Little by little she was being singled out for her sewing skills. Twice she had provided lace for a bridal veil and, after once embroidering a linen tablecloth at the request of a well-to-do customer, her reputation grew. Lily determined to open a dressmaking shop; perhaps becoming a professional designer some day.

As Frank promised, there was no other public explosion. Still. The times when she came home to find him sitting on the sofa, one sock on, the other in his hand while he stared at the floor were unnerving. Lily let him be, trounced off to the kitchen to clean up whatever mess he'd left. She tried; she really tried. Every single bit of housework—however minor—was hers: his clothes scattered on the floor; food encrusted dishes on the table, not even in the sink; beard hair in the drain; water logged towels bunched on bathroom tiles. Lily could go on and on. And did. Complaints grew into one-sided arguments since he wouldn't engage. The fog of displeasure surrounding her, thickened. Her resentment was justified by his

obvious indifference along with his combination of need and irresponsibility. Their bed work, once so satisfying, became for her a duty. On that snowy day when he asked to borrow one hundred dollars to take care of his sick sister in Georgia, Lily's anger fought with relief and lost. She picked up the dog tags he'd left on the dresser and hid them away in a drawer. The loneliness she felt before Frank walked her home dissolved, and in its place a sharp tingle of freedom, of earned solitude, of choosing the wall she wanted to break through minus the burden of caring for a tilted man. Unobstructed and undistracted, she could get serious and develop a plan to match her ambition. And succeed. That was what her parents had taught her and what she had promised them. To choose, they insisted, and not (ever) be moved. Let no insult or slight knock her off her ground. Or, as they were fond of misquoting, "Gather up your loins, daughter. Find your talent and drive it."

7.

COLD. MORE THAN FREEZING. KOREA COLD, HURTING  
AND CLINGING LIKE GLUE WITH NO WAY TO PEEL IT BACK.  
BATTLE IS SCAREY, YEAH, BUT IT'S ALIVE. ORDERS, GUT,  
PROTECTING BUDDIES, AGRESSION—NO THINKING REQUIRED.  
WAITING IS THE HARD PART. DAYS AND DAYS PASS WITH  
BUDDIES DOING WHATEVER WE COULD TO CUT THROUGH  
THE BOREDOM. WORST OF ALL IS SOLITARY GUARD DUTY



*for battle*  
WHILE WAITING! HOW MANY TIMES CAN YOU TAKE OFF  
YOUR GLOVES TO EXAMINE WHETHER YOUR FINGERNAILS  
ARE BLUE OR SHIFT YOUR BROWNING. MY EYES ARE TRAINED  
TO SEE MOVEMENT OF THE DEADLY MONGOLIANS WHO ARE  
MORE LETHAL THAN THE KOREANS. THE MONGOLS NEVER  
QUIT; NEVER STOP. WHEN YOU THINK THEY ARE DEAD THEY  
TURN OVER AND SHOOT YOU IN THE GUT. EVEN IF YOU ARE  
WRONG AND THEY ARE TRULY DEAD IT'S WORTH THE WASTE  
OF AMMO TO MAKE SURE. I SPENT DAYS LEANING ON A  
MAKESHIFT WALL. A TINY VILLAGE BELOW, HILLS BEYOND, A  
TIGHT CLUSTER OF BAMBOO PROTECTING MY LEFT. I STAYED  
ALERT FOR ANY HOSTILE ACTIVITY. NOTHING MOVED. ONCE  
IN A WHILE I HEARD CRACKLING IN THE BAMBOO STANDS. I  
WAS CERTAIN IT WAS NOT THE ENEMY—THEY NEVER CAME  
SINGLY—SO I GUESSED IT WAS A TIGER. THEY WERE  
SUPPOSED TO RANGE UP IN THE HILLS BUT NO ONE HAD SEEN  
ONE. BUT THEN I SAW A SMALL FIGURE MOVING THROUGH



BRAKES SO TINY IT HAD TO BE A DOG. THEN I SAW A LITTLE HAND STICKING OUT AND PATTING THE GROUND. I WAS GRATEFUL FOR THE HARMLESS DISTRACTION, AND SHE CAME ALMOST EVERY DAY, THIS CHILD CRAWLING THROUGH BAMBOO TO SCAVENGE OUR TRASH. I ONLY SAW HER FACE ONCE. MOSTLY I WATCHED HER HAND MOVING BETWEEN THE STALKS TO PAW GARBAGE. EACH TIME SHE CAME IT WAS AS WELCOME AS WATCHING A BIRD FEED HER YOUNG OR A HEN SCRATCHING, SCRATCHING GRAY DIRT FOR THE WORM SHE KNEW WAS BURIED THERE.

SOMETIMES HER HAND WAS INSTANTLY SUCCESSFUL AND SNATCHED A PIECE OF GARBAGE IN A WINK. OTHER TIMES JUST THE FINGERS STRETCHED, PATTING, SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING, ANYTHING, TO DIGEST. LIKE A TINY STARFISH—LEFT HANDED, LIKE ME. I'VE WATCHED RACOONS MORE CHOOSY WHEN RUMMAGING TRASH CANS. SHE WASN'T PICKY. ANYTHING NOT METAL, GLASS OR PAPER WAS FOOD

TO HER. SHE RELIED NOT ON HER EYES, BUT HER FINGERTIPS ALONE TO IDENTIFY NOURISHMENT. K RATION REFUSE, SCRAPS FROM PACKAGES SENT WITH LOVE FROM MOM FULL OF CRUMBLING CUP CAKES, FRUIT. AN ORANGE, SOFT NOW AND BLACKENED WITH ROT LIES JUST BEYOND HER FINGERS. SHE FUMBLES FOR IT. MY RELIEF GUARD COMES OVER, SEES HER HAND AND SHAKES HIS HEAD, SMILING. AS HE APPROACHES HER SHE RAISES UP AND IN WHAT LOOKED LIKE A HURRIED EVEN AUTOMATIC GESTURE SHE MOUTHED THE ONLY ENGLISH SHE'D BEEN TAUGHT: YUM YUM. SHE SMILES, REACHES FOR THE GUARD'S CROTCH, TOUCHES IT. HIS ANGER AND REVULSION SURPRISES HIM. YUM YUM? AS SOON AS I LOOK AWAY FROM HER HAND TO HER FACE, SEE THE TWO MISSING TEETH, THE FALL OF BLACK HAIR ABOVE EAGER EYES, HE BLOWS IT AWAY. ONLY THE HAND REMAINS, CLUTCHING ITS LIFE-SAVING TREASURE. EVERY CIVILIAN I EVER MET IN THAT COUNTRY WOULD (AND DID) DIE TO DEFEND THEIR

CHILDREN. STILL I KNEW THERE WERE A FEW WHO WOULD  
MARKET THEM. THINKING BACK ON IT NOW, I THINK THE  
RELIEF GUARD FELT MORE THAN REVULSION. I THINK HE FELT  
TEMPTED AND THAT IS WHAT HE HAD TO KILL.

YUM YUM.



8.

He held Mike in his arms while he bled and jerked, whispering, "Stay here, man. Come on. Stay with me." When Mike opened his mouth to speak, Frank leant in close and heard his friend say "I'm a tell Mama." Later when Stuff asked what he said, Frank lied. "He said see ya later." By the time medics got there, the urine on Mike's pants had frozen. It changed him. What died was more than a friend it was his memory. It was not only the sharing of women and Lucky Strikes; they were Lotus boys who had known each other before they were toilet trained; escaped Texas the same way, smelling the same smoke from houses torched with unbelievable malignance. As children they had cchased after straying cows, made themselves a ball park in the woods, fumbled their way into sex. Argued, fought, laughed, mocked and loved one another without ever having to say so.



Frank had not been brave before. He did what he was told and what was necessary. Now he was reckless, lunatic, firing, dodging the scattered parts of men. The begging, the howling for help he could not hear clearly until a tk plane dropped its load on the enemies' nest. In the post blast silence the screams wafted as though from a pen of lambs smelling their blood-soaked future. Now he was brave, whatever that meant. There were not enough dead gooks or chinks in the world to satisfy him. And that was before Red was pulverized and all of Stuff's blood emptied out from his blown away arm. There was too little left of Red to warrant a stretcher. Frank mushed through the remains to find his tags and a boot. Stuff got a stretcher, though, lay on it and died before the agony got to his brain.

9. HER EYES. FLAT, WAITING, ALWAYS WAITING. NOT PATIENT, NOT HOPELESS, BUT SUSPENDED. CEE. YCIDRA. MY SISTER. NOW MY ONLY FAMILY. A SHADOW FOR MOST OF MY LIFE, A PRESENCE MARKING ITS OWN ABSENCE, OR MAYBE MINE. WHO AM I WITHOUT HER—THAT UNDERFERD GIRL WITH THE WAITING EYES? HOW SHE TREMBLED WHEN WE HID FROM THE SHOVELS. I COVERED HER FACE, HER EYES, HOPING SHE HAD NOT SEEN THE FOOT POKING OUT OF THE GRAVE.

MY SISTER. MY ~~HISTORY~~ HISTORY.

SHE WAS THE FIRST PROTECTION I EVER TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR. IN HER WAS MY SECRET VISION OF MYSELF CONNECTED TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE HORSES

AND THE BURIAL OF A STRANGER. PROTECTING, FINDING THE  
WAY OUT, NOT BEING AFRAID. SUCCEEDING AT THAT WAS  
THE SEED OF ALL THE REST—MANHOOD, COURAGE. IN MY  
LITTLE BOY HEART I KNEW THAT IF THEY FOUND US OR  
TOUCHED HER I WOULD KILL.

10. tk

11. tk

12. tk

13. tk

14.

Blood ran down the back of her dress, down her leg. Frank found himself grateful to be legally relegated to the back of the bus where bench seats allowed the two of them space and protected passengers from the sight of a man carrying, dragging, an obviously hurt and drunken woman.

When they exited, Cee's feet had stopped working. Her toes scooted the gravel as the tops of her feet were dragged along. All the way to Miss Ethel Fordham's house, where they mounted the porch steps. A group of children stood in front of the yard watching a girl bat a paddle ball like a pro. When they notice the man and woman on Miss Ethel's porch, their eyes widened with



concern, until one of them pointed at the blood-stained dress and laughed. The paddle-ball girl hit him on the head, saying "Shut it!"

A peck basket of green beans sat by a chair. On a small table a bowl and paring knife. Through the screen door Frank heard singing.

"Miss Ethel? You in there?" Frank hollered, "It's me, Little Money. Miss Ethel?"

The singing stopped and Ethel Fordham looked through the screen door, not at him, but at his burden. She frowned. "Ycidra? Oh, girl."

Frank couldn't explain and didn't try to. He helped Miss Ethel get Cee on the bed after which she told Frank to wait outside. She lifted up Cee's dress and parted her legs.

"Have mercy," she whispered. Then, to the lingering Frank, "Go snap those beans. I got work to do."

15.

It was so bright, brighter than he remembered. The sun, having sucked away the blue from the sky, loitered there in a white heaven, menacing Lotus, torturing its landscape, but failing, failing constantly failing to obliterate it: children still laughed, ran, shouted their games; women sang in their back yards while unpinning sheets from the line; occasionally a soprano is joined by a neighboring alto or a tenor just passing by. Frank had not been on this dirt road in tk years, not stepped on the wooden planks covering the rain-washed out places. There were no sidewalks, but every yard was edged with flowers protecting vegetables from disease and predators—marigolds, chrysanthemums, mtk. The sun did its best to burn away the comfort, the relief emanating from shelter; did her best to ruin the pleasure of being among those who do not want to degrade or destroy you. Try as she might, she could not scorch the butterflies away from rose vines, nor choke the songs of birds. Her punishing heat did not interfere with Mr. tk and his nephew sitting in

the bed of a truck—the boy on a mouth organ, the man on a six-string banjo. The nephew's bare feet sway; the uncle's left boot taps out the beat.

This feeling of safety and good will, he knew, was exaggerated, but its pleasure was overwhelming. He convinced himself that somewhere nearby ribs of pork sizzled on a yard grill and inside the house there was potato salad and cole slaw and early mustards too. A pound cake rested on top of the icebox.

— gets work  
picking

Cee was standing at the stove pressing cabbage leaves into a pot of simmering water seasoned with two ham hocks. When Frank entered, he noticed a pile of cloth scraps on the sofa.

"Hey," he said. "Look at you."

"Bad?"

"No. You looking good. Feeling better, right?"

"Oh, much, much better. Hungry? This is just a no count meal. Want me to catch a hen?"

"No. Whatever you cooking is fine."

"I know you liked Mama's fry-pan bread. I'll make some."

"Want me to slice up these tomatoes?"

"Uh huh."

"What's all that stuff on the sofa?"

"Scraps for quilting."

"You ever need a quilt down here in your whole life?"

"No"

"Then why you make them?"

"Visitors buy them."

"What visitors?"

"People over in Jeffrey, Mount Haven. Miss Johnson from Good Shepherd buys them from me and sells them to tourists in Mount Haven."



"Nice."

"More than nice. We got electricity now and it costs money.

An electric fan alone is worth it."

"You could get yourself a refrigerator."

It's just me here. What I need with a cold box. I can can and anything else I need I go outside and pick, gather or kill it."

"What happened to that place we used to sneak off to?

Where the horses were."

"I heard some folks bought it for a place to play cards. Then they had women in there, then dog fights I heard."

"What did they do with the horses? Anybody know?"

"I don't. Ask Salem. He don't say nothing but he knows everything going on."

Tk

"Cee tells me that place yonder—with the horses—used to be a stud farm out tk way? She says it has dogfights now. That so?"

"Dog fights." Salem covers his mouth to <sup>funnel</sup>shape the laugh coming out.

"Why you laughing?"

"Dog fights. Pray that was all they done. No. That whole place burned down a while back, thank the sweet Lord."

"You want to know about them dog fights? More like men-treated-like dog fights."

"You didn't see that boy come through here crying? What did he call himself?"

"Jerome."

That's him. He told us they brought him and his daddy from Alabama. Roped up. Made them fight each other. With knives."

"No. Switchblades. Fight each other to the death."

"Boy said they slashed one another a bit—just enough to draw a line of blood, cause the game was set up so only the one left alive won. So one of them had to kill the other."

"Can you beat that? Pitting father against son?"

"He said he told his daddy, "No, Pa. No."

"His daddy told him ' You got to.'"

"Then, when he said no again, his daddy told him 'Obey me, son this one last time. Do it.'"

"And the crowd was going crazier and crazier, shouting 'Stop yapping. Fight! Fight!'"

"And?"

"And he did it. Come over here crying and told us all about it. Poor thing. Rose Ellen and Ethel collected some change for him so he could get away. We led him out on a mule. All he won was his life which I doubt was worth much to him after that."

"I don't believe they stopped that mess til Pearl Harbor."

"When was this?"

"When was what?"

"When the son, Jerome, came here."

"Long time. Ten years, eleven, I reckon. Say how's your sister?"

"Mendable. She'll be all right."

"She say what happened to my Ford?"

16. tk





1 saw a pregnant woman cut in half

1 saw a 4 year old <sup>(years)</sup> reach for  
a man's penis.