



Home Draft, as "Frank Money"

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FRANK MONEY

/ May 16

Further edit
on computer

1.

THEY ROSE UP LIKE MEN. WE SAW THEM. LIKE MEN
THEY STOOD.

WE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANYWHERE NEAR THAT
PLACE. LIKE MOST FARMLAND OUTSIDE LOTUS, GEORGIA,
THIS ONE HAD PLENTY SCAREY WARNING SIGNS. THE
THREATS HUNG FROM WIRE MESH FENCES WITH WOODEN
STAKES EVERY TEN OR SO FEET. BUT WHEN WE SAW A
CRAWL SPACE THAT SOME ANIMAL HAD DUG—A COYOTE
MAYBE OR A COON DOG—WE COULDN'T RESIST. JUST KIDS
WE WERE. THE GRASS WAS SHOULDER HIGH FOR HER AND
WAIST HIGH FOR ME SO, LOOKING OUT FOR SNAKES, WE
CRAWLED THROUGH IT ON OUR BELLIES. THE REWARD WAS
WORTH THE HARM GRASS JUICE AND CLOUDS OF GNATS DID
TO OUR EYES, BECAUSE THERE RIGHT IN FRONT OF US, ABOUT
FIFTY YARDS OFF, THEY STOOD LIKE MEN. THEIR RAISED

19-123-127#

HOOVES CRASHING AND STRIKING, THEIR MANES TOSSING BACK FROM WILD WHITE EYES. THEY BIT EACH OTHER LIKE DOGS BUT WHEN THEY STOOD, REARED UP ON THEIR HIND LEGS, THEIR FORELEGS AROUND THE WITHERS OF THE OTHER, WE HELD OUR BREATH IN WONDER. ONE WAS RUST-COLORED; THE OTHER DEEP BLACK, BOTH SUNNY WITH SWEAT. THE NEIGHS WERE NOT AS FRIGHTENING AS THE SILENCE FOLLOWING A KICK OF HIND LEGS INTO THE LIFTED LIPS OF THE OPPONENT. NEARBY, COLTS AND MARES, INDIFFERENT, NIBBLED GRASS OR LOOKED AWAY. THEN IT STOPPED. THE RUST-COLORED ONE DROPPED HIS HEAD AND PAWED THE GROUND WHILE THE WINNER LOPED OFF IN AN ARC, NUDGING THE MARES BEFORE HIM.

AS WE ELBOWED BACK THROUGH THE GRASS LOOKING FOR THE DUG OUT PLACE, AVOIDING THE LINE OF PARKED TRUCKS BEYOND, WE LOST OUR WAY. ALTHOUGH IT TOOK FOREVER TO RE-SIGHT THE FENCE, NEITHER OF US PANICKED UNTIL WE

HEARD VOICES, URGENT BUT LOW. I GRABBED HER ARM AND PUT A FINGER TO MY LIPS. NEVER LIFTING OUR HEADS, JUST PEEPING THROUGH THE GRASS, WE SAW THEM PULL A BODY FROM A WHEELBARROW AND THROW IT INTO A HOLE ALREADY WAITING. ONE FOOT STUCK UP OVER THE EDGE AND QUIVERED, AS THOUGH IT COULD GET OUT, AS THOUGH WITH A LITTLE EFFORT IT COULD BREAK THROUGH THE DIRT BEING SHOVELED IN. WE COULD NOT SEE THE FACES OF THE MEN DOING THE BURYING, ONLY THEIR TROUSERS; BUT WE SAW THE EDGE OF A SPADE DRIVE THE JERKING FOOT DOWN TO JOIN THE REST OF ITSELF. WHEN SHE SAW THAT BLACK FOOT WITH ITS CREAM-COLORED, MUD-STREAKED SOLE BEING WHACKED INTO THE GRAVE, HER WHOLE BODY BEGAN TO SHAKE. I HUGGED HER SHOULDERS TIGHT AND TRIED TO PULL HER TREMBLING INTO MY OWN BONES BECAUSE, AS A BROTHER FOUR YEARS OLDER, I THOUGHT I COULD HANDLE IT. THE MEN WERE LONG GONE AND THE MOON WAS A

CANTALOUPE BY THE TIME WE FELT SAFE ENOUGH TO
DISTURB EVEN ONE BLADE OF GRASS AND MOVE ON OUR
STOMACHS SEARCHING FOR THE SCOOPED-OUT PART UNDER
THE FENCE. WHEN WE GOT HOME WE EXPECTED TO BE
WHIPPED OR AT LEAST SCOLDED FOR STAYING OUT SO LATE,
BUT THE GROWN UPS DID NOT NOTICE US. SOME
DISTURBANCE HAD THEIR ATTENTION.

WHATEVER YOU THINK AND WHATEVER YOU WRITE DOWN,
KNOW THIS: I REALLY FORGOT ABOUT THE BURIAL. I ONLY
REMEMBERED THE HORSES. THEY WERE SO BEAUTIFUL. SO
BRUTAL. AND THEY STOOD LIKE MEN.

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.

2. Visualizing a blank sheet of paper drove his mind to the letter he

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 on the second floor 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, 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. What about the ocean on a cloudy day seen from the deck of a troop ship—no horizon or hope of one. No. Not that because among the bodies kept cool below some, maybe all, were his home boys. 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 locker. He only 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 a simple cover story 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. ^(over) Nothing in particular stood out except the violent neon of a diner sign and a huge yard sign for a tiny church: AME Zion. If he succeeded in getting through the fire exit that's where he would head: to Zion. Still, before escape, he would have to get shoes somehow, someway. Walking anywhere in

He had never been in this
~~the~~ neighborhood. Central Seattle
was his territory.

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 clear purpose anywhere. Carrying a book would help, but being barefoot would contradict "purposefulness" and standing still could prompt 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 with 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". It was ^{early} ~~mid~~-morning when the warnings came, so the balance of the day was confusion, anger, and packing. By nightfall most were pulling out—on wheels if available, on foot if not. Yet, in spite

of the threats from men, both hooded and not, and pleadings from neighbors, one elderly man named Crawford ^{sat} stood on his porch ^{steps} and refused to vacate. ^{Elbows ON Knees, hands clasped} Hands on hips, chewing tobacco, ^{leaning} against his porch post, he waited the whole night. ^{Just after} At dawn at the twenty-fourth hour he was beaten to death with pipes, 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 used to brag, his great grandmother planted, that made him so stubborn. In the dark of night, some of the fleeing neighbors snuck back to untie him and bury him beneath his beloved magnolia. One of the gravediggers told everyone who would listen that Mr. Crawford's eyes had been carved out.

Although shoes were vital for this escape, the patient had none. Four a.m., before sunrise, he managed to loosen the canvas cuffs, unshackle himself and rip off the hospital gown. He put on his army pants, jacket, and crept shoeless down the hall. Except for the weeping from the room next to the fire 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 footprints left in the snow. ^(over) 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, then wider, revealing a gray-haired man in flannel

He has no ^{pocket} change so ^{phone} to look for a booth
It never occurred to him to ^{chilly} guard
Call Lily. Not only because of their ^{parting} parting
but also because it would shame him
to need her ^{now} under these circumstances:
a barefoot escapee from the nut house.

robe, holding his glasses and frowning at the impudence of a pre-dawn visitor.

He wanted to say "Good morning," or "Excuse me", 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?"

Sir.
"Frank. Frank Money."

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

Frank nodded while stamping his feet and trying to rub life 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 sank down on the sofa.

only vaguely caring or wondering what the man was talking about

"Uh huh. To the medical school."

Where They sell dead bodies?
"Why? What for?"

"Well, you know, doctors need to work on the dead poor so they can help the live 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} also wrong."

Still shivering

"Hello 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 slip covers stretched taught over the sofa did not help.

"Sorry if the house is too cold for you." Locke noticed Frank's trembling lips. "We accustomed to rain around here, not snow. Where you from, anyway?"

"Round here. Central city."

Locke ^{groaned} grunted as though that explained everything. "How ³ did you end up in the hospital instead of jail? That's where most barefoot, half-dressed folks go."

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

"How'd it get there?" Locke squinted. "Police looking

"I don't know."

"You don't remember?"

"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."

"No. Just the noise. Loud. Real loud." Frank rubbed his forehead. *"Maybe I was in a fight?" —> over)*

Not nervous, just worried.
~~"I see."~~ Reverend Locke gave him a worried glance. "Where you headed, brother?" He was still standing with his hands behind his back.

^ sir If I can make it.
 "Georgia."

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

He put the question as though the
Reverend might know why he'd
been ^{bound and} sedated for 2 days.

"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 pull you in for? The police." ^{I mean} Locke asked.

What indeed. Other than that B 52 roar, exactly what he was doing to attract police attention was long gone. He couldn't explain it to himself, let alone someone else. ^{If he wasn't in a fight} Was he peeing on the sidewalk? ? Hollering curses at some passerby, some schoolchildren? Was he banging his head on a wall or hiding behind bushes in somebody's back yard?

^{— 7 over}
"Acting up," he said. "Something like that." He truly could not remember. Had he thrown himself on the ground at the sudden sound of backfire? Perhaps he started a fight with a stranger or started weeping before trees—apologizing to them for acts he had never committed. What he did remember was that soon as Lily shut

He had not expected the "it" to return
so soon after he left Lily. Only two bottles of beer
and he WAS, ~~as dumbfounded as anybody~~
a drift in nightmare.

the door behind him, he bought a few shots to steady himself for the long trip. But when he left the bar, sanity left too. Back was the free floating rage, the self-loathing disguised as somebody else's fault. And the memory loss that had begun at Fort Lawson. No sooner than discharged he had begun to wander. When he disembarked, he thought to send a telegram home, since no one in Lotus owned a telephone. But along with the telephone operators' strike the telegraph people were striking too. On a two-cent post card, he wrote, "I am back safe. See you all soon." 'Soon' never arrived because he didn't want to go home without his 'home boys'. —→(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 scratched his chin and was about to speak when Jean came back with a cup and a plate of soda crackers. "It's just hot water with lots of salt in it," she said. "Drink it up, but slowly. I'll get you a blanket."

He was far too ^{to stand}
~~How could he stand~~ ^{Alive} before Mike's
his easy breath and
mama. She would resent ~~it~~ and he unscathed
self.
Could not blame her.

Frank sipped twice and then gulped down the rest. When Jean brought more, she said "Son, dip the crackers in the liquid. They'll go down better."

"Jean," said Locke, "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.

"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 ^{dappled with body parts} that ended in fire. He woke ^{militant} 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 like broken feet. Then he

heard murmurs from another room. Staring at the socks, it all came into focus: the hospital escape, the freezing run, finally Reverend Locke and his wife. So he was back in the real world when Locke came in and asked how ~~four~~^{three} hours of sleep felt.

"Good. I feel fine,"
~~"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~~^{eight} one-dollar bills and a wash of coins. It could have been a poker pot, except it was surely 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 and maybe to Chicago too. It won't get you 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. 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 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 that 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. ^{She} 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."

Frank stood at the door, while the Reverend retrieved his coat and car keys.

"Goodbye, Mrs. Locke. I do thank you."

"Stay safe, son" she answered, patting his shoulder.

At the ticket window, Locke converted the coins into paper money and bought Frank's ticket. Before joining the line at the

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 ^(over) ~~empty trees~~, the lonesome houses ^{looking} ~~with~~ little red ^{reshaped the snow while a} wagons ^{here and there held mounds of it.} ~~upside down in snow-mushed yards.~~ Only the 1950 trucks

^{stuck in driveways} looked alive. As he mused about what it might be like in those

houses, he could imagine nothing at all. Again, as was ^{So} ~~so~~ often the case when he was alone and sober, ^{into} ~~whatever~~ the surroundings, ^{slid} ~~he~~ ^{image}

^{of} 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,

Quiet trees unable to speak
without ^{their} leaves

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 living with her had become: a tired cruelty laced her voice and the buzz of her disappointment defined the silence. Sometimes Lily's face seemed to morph into the front of a jeep—unforgiving headlight eyes, a bright, scouring above a grill-like smile. Strange how she had changed. Perhaps he was too conscious of body parts.

Remembering what he loved about her: the slight paunch, the back of her knees and her knock-out beautiful face, it was as though someone had re-drawn her as a cartoon. It couldn't be all his fault, could it? Yes, he sat on occasion for hours in the quiet—numb, unwilling to talk. Yes, he regularly lost the few odd jobs he'd managed to secure. And while ^{sometimes being} he once in a while couldn't bear to ^{made it hard to breathe} 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 with the girl-weight of her arm on his chest, the nightmares folded away and he could sleep. Waking up with her 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, sure but waiting, waiting and accusing. Why didn't you help him? Pull him along they 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 you believed 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 girl. What did she ever do to deserve what happened to her? 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 the can of Calumet she needed for the meal she was preparing for him. Their first. He should have jumped up, pulled what ^{she wanted} ~~it was~~ from the shelf. 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 noticed, 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 in Portland. 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. More than enough to get to Chicago. Still, hostile as he was, Reverend Maynard gave him helpful information for his journey. From Green's Traveler's book he copied out some addresses and names of rooming houses, hotels where he would not be turned away.

Anxiety about whether he would have another incident: uncontrollable, suspicious, destructive and illegal, was shrinking. It had taken a while, but sometimes he could tell when a break was coming. The first time it happened when he boarded a bus near fort Lawton—just off the ship—he was quiet, just sitting 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.

Tk[Portland to Chicago train station]

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 riot, 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 waiter passed by, Frank touched his arm, asking "What happened?" *He pointed to the couple.*

"You didn't see that?"

"No. What was it?"

"That there is the husband. He got off at Elko to buy some coffee 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."

tk

The waiter, whose nametag said Taylor, chuckled. "You want a shot? I got some Johnny Red in my case."

"Yeah. Oh, yeah."

Frank's taste buds, uninterested in cheese sandwiches or fruit, 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 man had forgotten, Taylor returned with a teacup, saucer and napkin. ^{An inch of} 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.

With his head^{back} on the window frame he napped a bit following the ~~cup~~ of scotch and woke when he heard someone taking the seat next to him. Odd. There were several empty seats throughout the car. He turned and, more amused, than startled, examined his seat partner. A small man wearing a wide-brimmed hat. His pale blue suit sported a long jacket and balloon trousers. His shoes were white with unnaturally pointed toes. The man stared ahead.

Ignored, Frank leaned back to the window to pick up his nap. As soon as he did, the blue suited man got up and disappeared down the aisle. No indentation was left in the leather seat.

Passing through poorly washed scenery, Frank re-decorated it, mind-painting giant slashes of black and X's of gold on hills, dripping red on wheat fields. Hours of re-coloring the world quieted him so 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.

Two hours later he was scooping up navy beans and buttering corn bread. Taylor, the waiter, had been right. ^{Booker's} ~~Sookeys~~' 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 who volunteered his name.

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

"Frank Money."

"Where you from, Frank?"

"Aw, man. Korea, Kentucky, San Diego, Seattle, Georgia.

Name it I'm from it."

"You looking to be from here, too?"

"No. I'm headed on back 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. Loud and knowing. Some began to compete with stories of their own deprived life in the thirties.

Me and my brother slept in a freight car for a month.

Where was it headed?

Away was all we knew.

You ever sleep in a coop the chickens wouldn't enter?

Aw, man, shut up. We lived in a ice house.

Where was the ice?

We ate it.

Get out!

I slept on so many floors , first time I saw a bed I thought it was a coffin.

You ever eat dandelions?

In soup, they good.

Hog guts. They call it something fancy now, but butchers used to throw them out or give them to us.

Feet, too. Necks. All offal.

Hush. You ruining my business.

When the boasts and laughter died down, 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 back to the station on my way to work tomorrow.

You taking a bus south or the train? Bus is cheaper."

"Train, Billy. Long as there're porters, that's the way I want to travel."

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

They walked all the way. "We'll buy you some decent shoes in the morning," said Billy. —> over

"Say hello to my wife, Arlene, and this is our little man, Thomas."

Frank thought Arlene pretty enough for the stage. Her pompadour crowned a high, smooth forehead over fierce brown eyes.

"You all want supper?" Arlene asked.

"No," Billy said. "We ate already."

"Good." Arlene was getting ready for her night shift at the metal factory. She kissed Thomas on the top of his head as he sat at the kitchen table reading a book.

Billy and Frank leaned over the coffee table re-arranging its do-dads to play cards, talk and drink beer. Earlier when Billy

Frank laughed. He had forgotten how
raggedy ~~his~~^{he} feet looked, although nobody
else had. Chicago, braced by wind
and a smug ~~afternoon~~^{twilight} sky,
was full of ~~the~~^{strutting} well dressed pedestrians
moving quickly - as though meeting a
deadline ~~down~~^{somewhere} sidewalks wider than
Country Roads. ~~When~~^{By the time} they left
downtown and entered Billy's neighborhood
night was ~~coming fast~~ on its way.

introduced his son to Frank, the boy had lifted his left arm to shake hands, Frank noticed the right one sagging at his side. Now, shuffling the deck, he asked what happened to his son's arm. Billy 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.

"Cops shoot anything they want. Arlene went a little crazy in the emergency room. They threw her out twice. But it turned out all right in the end. The bad arm kept him off the streets and in the classroom. 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—except the fire zone. "Jesus. Jesus!" That's what Mike said. Red yelled it too. "Jesus, God Almighty, I'm fucked, Frank, Jesus, help me."

The math wiz had no objection to sleeping on the sofa and letting his father's new friend have his bed. Frank approached ^{in the boy's bedroom} him, saying "Thanks, Buddy."

"My name is Thomas," said the boy.

"Oh, ok, Thomas. I hear you good at math."

"I'm good at everything."

"Like what?"

"Civics, geography, English."

"You'll go far, son."

"And I'll go deep."

Frank laughed at the impudence of the eleven year old.

"What sport you play?" he asked, thinking maybe the boy needed a little humility. But Thomas gave him a look so cold Frank was embarrassed. "I mean..."

"I know what you mean. You shouldn't drink."

"Got that right."

A short silence followed while Thomas placed a folded blanket on top of a pillow. At the bedroom door he turned to Frank. "Were you in the war?"

"I was."

"Did you kill anybody?"

"Had to."

"How did it feel?"

"Bad. Real bad."

"That's good. That it made you feel bad. I'm glad."

"How come?"

"It means you're not a liar."

"You are deep, Thomas." Frank smiled. "What you want to do when you grow up?"

Thomas opened the door. "Save the world," he said and left.

Frank went back to bed, thinking the sighting was not all that bad compared to others he'd had. No guns, no dogs or birds. The remains of his friends. This one was comic in a way. He thought about these things, but never saw anybody wearing one. The mare was the mare and manhood was the message he had learned about himself and some white point unfurling on fore and hind cheeks. Nothing a species of course. But the zoo suiters chose another costume: wide shoulders, wide hips, and a pair of fingered feet or was it toe-tipped hands. But after a few hours of dreamlessness, he woke to the sound of a click

like the squeeze of a trigger from a gun minus ammo. Frank sat up. Nothing stirred. Then the outline of the small man, the one from the train, his wide-brimmed hat unmistakable in the frame of light at the window. Frank reached for the bedside lamp. Its glow revealed the same little sad-faced man in a light blue zoot suit.

"Hey! Who the hell are you? What you want?" Frank rose from the bed and moved toward the figure. After three steps 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 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

beyond the waist to the chest.

tk

Damn! He didn't want ^{any} ^{some ghost for} Company. Unless
 he was ^{a sign} trying to tell him something.

~~Samebo~~ WAS it about his sister ^S ^{she is}
 The letter ^{said} ~~or~~ "She be dead." ^{meaning she is} ^{alive but} ~~so she~~
~~was~~ sick, very sick and there was no
 one to help her - if ^{Sarah} the letter writer,
 Couldn't help and her boss wouldn't
 well she ~~was~~ ^{must be} withering away. Parents
 dead - one of lung disease, another
 of stroke. Strike Salem or Noella.

Neither one was capable - assuming
 they'd ^{even} be interested. Maybe that was

the reason ^{Mingul bullet} ^{had blown} ~~no Korean~~ his head off.

3. While everybody else he was close to
~~AT~~ died ^{over} there. Maybe ^{his life} ^{was} preserved for Cee
 which was only fair since she had been
 his original responsibility, his very first caring
 for - ~~with~~ ^{Selfless w/o} ~~any~~ gain or emotional profit.

fix

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
^{NOBODY} THEY COULDN'T LOAD THEIR LAND, ^{THEIR} CROPS, ^{THEIR} OR
^{COVER} STOCK. IT WAS A LONG TIME BEFORE THE SMELL OF BURNED
 DOWN HOUSES DISAPPEARED. MOST FAMILIES, ^{of us,} LIKE MINE,
 WALKED FOR MILES UNTIL MR. GARDENER CAME BACK FOR
^{a few more of us} US AFTER DROPPING HIS OWN PEOPLE AT THE STATE LINE. ^{HE} HE
^{After Mr. Gardener} TOOK US A DISTANCE AND THEN WE WALKED SOME MORE.
^{as far as he could}
 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,
^{food} COMPARES TO THE LEFT OVERS AT PANTRIES. WRITE ABOUT
 THAT, WHY DON'T YOU? I REMEMBER STANDING IN LINE AT
 CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER WAITING FOR A TIN PLATE OF

Is somebody
~~who's~~ going to feed the hogs? or let them
go wild. What about that patch behind the
shed, it needs tilling before in case it rains.

We had to leave our wheelbarrow full of
stuff ^{in order} to pile into his car, trading goods for
speed. Mama cried but the baby she carried
was more important than Kettles and canning
Jars, bedding and

She contented herself with a basket of ~~the~~ ^{shir} clothes
held on ~~her knees~~ ^{her knees} left of her lap. Papa carried
a few tools in a sack and ~~the~~ the reins of the
horse he would never see again.

DRY, HARD CHEESE ALREADY SHOWING GREEN, PICKLED PIGS' FEET—ITS VINEGAR SOAKING STALE BISCUITS.

IT WAS THERE 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.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT HEAT IS UNTIL YOU CROSS THE LINE
FROM TEXAS TO LOUISIANA IN THE SUMMER. YOU CANT
COME UP WITH WORDS THAT CATCH IT.

TREES GIVE UP. TURTLES COOK IN THEIR SHELLS. DESCRIBE
THAT IF YOU KNOW HOW.

Cee stood up in the zinc tub and took a few dripping steps to
the sink. She filled a bucket from the faucet, poured it into the
warming 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

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 sink. She filled a bucket from the faucet, poured it into the warming 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. Well, yes, 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 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 street women, prostitutes, went to hospitals when they got pregnant, 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.

Noella's 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 the girl entered, the lips turned down at every drop of a spoon, trip on the doorsill, a 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 shacks 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 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 in having their own garden and their own laying hens. The Money's had enough of it to feel at home in this place offering friendship instead of pity. Everybody in the neighborhood, except Noella, was stern but quickly 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 washed up, fed and led away on a mule. It was nice having their own house where 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 comic books, chewing gum and peppermint 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 Aesop's Fables 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, didn't nobody teach you how to sew? Yes ma'am. Then why is your hem hanging like that? Yes, ma'am. I mean no Ma'am. Is that lipstick on your mouth? No ma'am. What then? Cherries, ma'am, I mean blackberries. 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 stand up straight 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 belted trousers 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 shiny, 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 adrift in 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 about 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 himself to take so he took her to Atlanta. Cee looked forward to a shiny life in the city and—after a few weeks of ogling 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, and 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 the heat of Georgia's version of spring with cool water while Prince was cruising around with his thin-soled shoes pressing the gas pedal in ^{California} 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 wash tub. 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, Stuff 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 outside.

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 had invented escapades, or investigated surrounding territory. Even when Frank was with ^{his boys} friends, Mike and Stuff, he had 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 ^(over) 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 single enthusiasm, besides food, was playing checkers with some other old men. Their 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 ^{ignored} forgotten Hansel and Gretel, locked hands as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future.

the ^{four} were tight, the way family
ought to be. She remembered

Standing at the window wrapped in ^{her} a scratchy towel, Cee felt her heart breaking. If Frank were there he would once more touch the top of her head 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 me 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 began to sweat. She toweled the damp under her breasts then wiped perspiration from her forehead.

She raised the window way above the tear in the screen. 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 bigger than that. She was broken. Not broken up but broken down, down into her separate parts.

Cooled, finally, she unhooked the dress Principal had bought her their second day in Atlanta; not, she learned, from generosity but because he was ashamed of her Lotus clothes. Nevertheless, its rayon-silky touch still pleased her, as did its riot of blue dahlias on a white background. She had never ~~in life~~ seen a flower printed dress. ^{before} 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?" asked Thelma.

"Can't hurt."

"Yes, it can." Thelma wiped her hands. "This is the hottest spring I've seen. 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-accounts 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 one crazy name."

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

"Ok. Ok. Say, matter of fact, you might be in luck. Just so happens I heard about something couple weeks ago when I was in Reba's. Everything worth knowing you hear in her beauty shop."

"What'd you hear?"

"A couple in tk—just outside the city—Reba said 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 hampered by Cee's white, high-heeled shoes. Without stockings, her feet were

chafing. She carried a shopping bag brimming with the little she owned 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 church-neat lawn. Cee wasn't sure whether she should 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. "You must be the one Reba called about. Step on in. My name is Sarah. Sarah Williams. The doctor's wife will see you shortly."

"Thank you, ma'am. Can I take off these shoes first"?

Sarah laughed. "Whoever 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, "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, nodded and, with a forefinger, 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. 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. His inventions help people. He's no Dr. Frankenstein."

"Doctor who?"

"Never mind. Just do what he says the way he wants and you'll be fine. Now go. Sarah will show you to your room."

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 this chicken?"

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

"I know I'm old, but please call me Sarah."

"All right, if you want me to." Cee was surprised by her hunger. Being an habitual light eater, and surrounded by hot, red 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."

"Uh huh. She's easy to work for too. Has a schedule, certain like and needs—never changes. Dr. Beau—that's what everybody calls him—is very gentlemanly."

"Doctor Bo?"

"His full name is Beauregard Scott."

"They have any children?"

"Two girls. They're away. She tell you anything about what you work here is?"

"No. She said the doctor would do that. He's a scientist as well as a doctor, she said."

"It's true. He invents things. Gets patents for a lot of them."

"Patterns?" Cee mouth was full of potato salad. "Like dress patterns?"

"No, girl. Like licenses to make things. From the government."

Oh.
"Is there any more chicken, please? It's real good."

"Thanks." Cee wiped her fingers. "Oh, I feel so much better now."
"Sure is, honey," Sarah smiled. "I'll fatten you up in no time if you stay here long enough."

"Was there other seconds working here? Did they get let go?" Cee looked anxious.

"Well, some quit. I remember just one who was fired."

"What for?"

"I never did find out what the matter was. He seemed just fine to me. Young he was and friendlier than most. I know they argued about something and Dr. Beau said he wouldn't have fellow travelers in his house."

"What's a fallow traveler?"

"Fellow, not fallow. Beats me. Something fierce, I reckon. Dr. Beau is a heavy-weight Confederate. His grandfather was killed in some famous battle up North. Here's a napkin."

"Thanks." Cee wiped her fingers. "Oh, I feel so much better now."

"Let me show you to your room. It's down stairs and not much, but for sleep it's as good as anything. It's got a mattress made for a queen."

Downstairs was just a few feet below the front porch—more of a shallow extension of the house rather than a proper basement. Cee's room was narrow and without windows. Next to it was a locked door leading to what Sarah said was a bomb shelter, fully stocked. She had placed Cee's shopping bag on the floor. Two nicely starched uniforms saluted from their hangers on the wall.

"Wait till tomorrow to put one on," said Sarah, adjusting the pristine collar of her handiwork.

"Oooh, this is nice. Look, a little desk." Cee gazed at the bed's headboard then touched it with a grin. She shuffled her feet on the small rug lying next to the bed. Then, after peeping behind a folding screen to see the toilet and sink, she plopped on the bed, delighting in the thickness of the mattress. When she pulled the sheets back she giggled at its silk cover. So there, Noella, she thought. What you sleep on in that broke down bed you got? Remembering the thin,

bumpy mattress Noella slept on, she couldn't help herself and laughed with wild glee.

"Shh, girl. Glad you like it, but don't laugh so loud. It's frowned on here."

"Why is that?"

"Tell you later."

"No. Now, Sarah, please?"

"Well, remember those daughters 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 my Lord. What a misery," said Cee, thinking, I guess that's why he invents things—he wants to help other folks.

The next morning, standing before her employer, Cee found him formal but welcoming. A small man with lots of

silver hair, Dr. Beau sat stiffly behind a wide, neat desk. The first question he put to her was whether she had children or had been with a man. Cee told him she was married for a spell, but had not gotten pregnant. He seemed pleased to hear that. Her duties, he said, were primarily cleaning instruments and equipment, tidying and keeping a schedule of patients' names, time of appointments and so on. He did his own billing in his office, which was separate from the examination/laboratory room.

"Be here promptly at ten in the morning," he said, "and be prepared to work late if the situation calls for it. Also, be prepared for the reality of medicine: sometimes blood, sometimes pain. You will have to be steady and calm. Always. If you can you'll do just fine. 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 the well-to-do ones from the neighborhood or from Atlanta proper. He was extremely careful with his patients, finicky about observing their privacy, except when he invited another doctor to join him in working on a patient. When all of his dedicated help didn't help and a patient got much worse he sent her to a charity hospital in the city. When one or two died in spite of his care, he donated money for funeral expenses. 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 nothing of Mrs. Scott. Sarah, who took care of all her needs, said the lady of the house never left it and had a tiny laudanum craving. The doctor's wife spent much of her time painting flowers in water color or watching television shows. Dobie Gillis and the Honeymooners were

her favorites. She had flirted with I Love Lucy, but hated Ricky Ricardo too much to watch it.

One day, a couple of weeks into the job, Cee entered Dr. Beau's office a half hour before he arrived. She was always in awe of the crowded bookshelves. Now she examined the medical books closely, running her finger over some of the titles: Out of the Night. Must be a mystery, she thought. Then, The Passing of the Great Race, and next to it, Heredity, Race and Society.

How small, how useless was her schooling, she thought, and promised herself she would find time to read about and understand "eugenics." This was a good, safe place, she knew, and Sarah had become her family, her friend and her confidante. They shared every meal and sometimes the cooking. 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 inside," said Sarah, on a very hot afternoon that first week. "The flies are too much today. Besides, I have some honey dew's need eating before they soften."

In the kitchen, Sarah removed three melons from a peck basket. She caressed one slowly, then another. "Males," she snorted.

Cee lifted the third one, then stroked its lime yellow peel, tucking her forefinger into the tiny indentation at the stem break. "Female," she laughed. "This one's a female."

"Oh, hallelujah." Sarah joined Cee's laughter with a low chuckle. "Always the sweetest."

"Always the juiciest, " echoed Cee.

"Can't beat the girl for flavor."

"Can't beat her for sugar."

5. Sarah slid a long, sharp knife from a drawer and, with intense anticipation of the pleasure to come, cut the girl in two.

WOMEN ARE EAGER TO TALK TO ME WHEN THEY HEAR MY LAST NAME. MONEY? THEY SNIGGER AND ASK THE SAME QUESTIONS: 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 EASY 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 IN LOTUS AND KENTUCKY, I'VE KNOWN ONLY FOUR

5. WOMEN. THREE OF THEM WERE SHORT BUT HALF-WAY
 SERIOUS RELATIONSHIPS AND I LIKED THE SMALL BREAKABLE
 THING INSIDE EACH ONE. WHATEVER THEIR PERSONALITY,
 WOMEN ARE EAGER TO TALK TO ME WHEN THEY HEAR MY
 SMARTS OR LOOKS, SOMETHING SOFT LAY INSIDE EACH ONE.
 LAST NAME. MONEY? THEY SNIGGER AND ASK THE SAME
 A BIRD'S BREASTBONE, SHAPED AND CHOSEN TO WHACK ON
 QUESTIONS: WHO NAMED ME THAT OR IF ANYBODY DID. IF I
 A LITTLE V, THINNER THAN BONE AND BARELY HINGED, THAT
 MADE IT UP TO MAKE MYSELF FEEL IMPORTANT OR WAS I A
 COULD BREAK WITH A FOREFINGER IF I WANTED TO, BUT
 GAMBLER OR THIEF OR SOME OTHER KIND OF CROOK THEY
 NEVER DID. WANT TO, I MEAN. KNOWING IT WAS THERE
 SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR? WHEN I TELL THEM MY WHOLE
 HIDING FROM ME, WAS ENOUGH.
 NAME, FIRST AND LAST, THEY SCREAM WITH LAUGHTER AND
 SAY: THERE AIN'T NO SUCH THING. ALL MONEY IS FAKE. NO
 END OF EASY 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 ^{getting lucky} A FEW ~~QUICK~~ OPPORTUNITIES
^{some street girls in} IN LOTUS AND KENTUCKY, I'VE KNOWN ONLY FOUR
 BACK
 ^

WOMEN. ~~THREE OF THEM WERE SHORT BUT HALF-WAY~~
~~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 ^{third} ~~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 ^{troubled} ~~SCARED~~ ME. I MET HER
 AT A CLEANERS. LATE FALL, IT WAS, BUT IN ^{that City} ~~SEATTLE~~, WHO
 COULD TELL? SOBER AS SUNLIGHT, I HANDED HER MY ARMY
 ISSUE AND COULDN'T TAKE MY EYES AWAY FROM HERS. I
 MUST HAVE LOOKED THE FOOL, BUT I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE ONE. I

FELT LIKE I'D COME HOME. FINALLY. I'D BEEN WANDERING.
 NOT EXACTLY HOMELESS, BUT CLOSE. DRINKING AND
 HANGING OUT IN MUSIC BARS ON JACKSON STREET.
 SLEEPING ANYWHERE, BETTING MY FORTY-THREE DOLLARS OF
 ARMY PAY IN CRAP GAMES AND POOL HALLS. AND WHEN
 THAT WAS GONE, I TOOK QUICK DAY JOBS UNTIL THE NEXT
 CHECK CAME.

I ~~DON'T~~ REMEMBER EXACTLY WHY I HADN'T HAD A DRINK IN
 FOUR DAYS ^{AND} ~~OR~~ NEEDED TO DRY CLEAN MY CLOTHES. ~~MAYBE~~
^{BECAUSE of} IT WAS THAT MORNING I WALKED ^{when} ~~OVER THE~~ BRIDGE. A ^{down by a}
 CROWD WAS MILLING THERE ALONG WITH AN AMBULANCE. *
~~IN~~ A MEDIC'S ARMS ^{Holding} WAS A LITTLE GIRL ^{vomiting} COUGHING UP
 WATER, BLOOD ^{RAN} RUNNING FROM HER NOSE. ^A THE SADNESS ~~E~~
~~FEEL~~ HIT ME LIKE A PILE DRIVER. ^{My stomach felt} SUDDEN. ~~I DIDN'T WANT THE~~ ^{AND just the thought of}
 TASTE OF LIQUOR AFTER THAT. I SPENT A FEW DAYS ON ^{nights}
 BENCHES IN THE PARK UNTIL THE COPS RAN ME OFF. ^{on the fourth} WHEN I ^{day}
 CAUGHT MY REFLECTION IN A STORE WINDOW I THOUGHT IT

* When I got close enough I saw

WAS SOMEBODY ELSE. SOME DIRTY, PITIFUL LOOKING GUY. I
(over) 2
DECIDED TO CLEAN UP ~~AND~~ MAKE MY HOME BOYS PROUD.

SO WHEN I SAW THIS WOMAN AT THE CLEANERS, I WAS
WIDE OPEN FOR HER. 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.

YOU ARE DEAD WRONG IF YOU THINK I WAS SCOUTING
FOR A HOME WITH A BOWL OF SEX IN IT. SOMETHING
ABOUT HER FLOORED ME; MADE ME WANT TO BE GOOD
ENOUGH FOR HER. IS THAT TOO HARD FOR YOU TO
UNDERSTAND? EARLIER YOU WROTE ABOUT HOW SURE I
WAS THAT THE BEAT UP MAN ON THE TRAIN WOULD TURN
AROUND AND WHIP THE WIFE WHO TRIED TO HELP HIM
WHEN THEY GOT HOME. NOT TRUE. I DIDN'T THINK ANY
SUCH THING. WHAT I THOUGHT WAS THAT HE WAS PROUD
OF HER BUT DIDN'T WANT TO SHOW HOW PROUD HE WAS

He was the me in a dream I had.
Where I'm on a battle field alone. Nobody
① anywhere. Silence everywhere. I keep walking
but I don't find any body.

② To hell with the dream. I ^{decided} ~~wanted~~ to

to the other
men

^ ON THE TRAIN. I DON'T THINK YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT
LOVE.

OR ME.

The actors were much nicer than the actresses. At least they called her by her name and didn't mind if their costume didn't quite fit or was stained from old makeup. The women called her 'girl', as in "Where's the girl?" "Girl, where's my jar of Pond's?" And they raged when their wigs or their own hair didn't obey.

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 sweet misted the foreheads of Mr. Stone and his students. Lily thought they were

6. more animated 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

The actors were much nicer than the actresses. At least they called her by her name and didn't mind if their costume didn't quite fit or was stained from old makeup. The women called her 'girl', as

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more animated 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 down, 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. The play, from her point of view, wasn't very good. Lots of talking, very little action, but not so bad it had to be closed. Certainly not as bad as the one they rehearsed but couldn't get permission to perform. "The Morrison Case" it was called if her memory was right.

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 little bedroom she rented to the theater. Lily stood in the pressing room, recalling a recent irritation blossoming into anger. The response she had

recently 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 leave the rooming house and put a down payment on a house of her own. She had circled an advertisement for a lovely one for five thousand dollars and, although it was far from her work at the cleaners, she would happily commute from so nice a neighborhood. The stares she had gotten as she strolled the neighborhood did not trouble her, since she knew how neatly *and how perfect her straightened hair.* dressed she was. Finally, after a few weekend strolls, she consulted a realtor. When she described her purpose and the couple of houses on sale she had found, the agent smiled and said, "I'm really sorry."

"They're sold already?" asked Lily.

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 ANY PERSON OF THE ETHIOPIAN, MALAY, OR ASIATIC RACE EXCEPTING ONLY EMPLOYEES IN DOMESTIC SERVICE.

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

"Thank you," said Lily. She raised her chin 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 Wangs, and even after they gave her a seventy-five cents raise, she was feeling restless and stifled. 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, had left her to attend the counter. She told the customer the '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 waves in uncharted 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, becoming a couple of sorts that very week. But later on day. So when he said he had to leave her for family reasons, Lily felt one abnormal pulse beat. That was all.

Living with Frank had been glorious at first. Its break down was more of a stutter than a single eruption. More often it became annoyance, rather than concern when she came home from work and saw him sitting on the sofa staring at the floor. One sock on, the other in his hand. Neither calling his name nor leaning toward his face moved him. So Lily let him be, trouncing off to the kitchen to clean up whatever mess he'd left. The times when it was as good as the beginning, when waking up with him next to her, his dog tags under her cheek, became more seldom. Still, whether annoyed or concerned, she had forgiven him much: like that time in February when they went to a church convention held in a high school football field. Known more for table after table of delicious free food than for proselytizing, the church welcomed everybody. And everybody came—not only members of the congregation. The non-believers, crowding the entrance and lining up for food, outnumbered the Believers. 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 a sunlight from sashayed through the clouds, Lily and Frank exchanged their slickers for sweaters and strolled hand in hand to the stadium. Lily held her chin a bit higher and wished Frank had had a haircut. People gave him more than a passing glance, probably because he was so tall, or so she hoped. Anyway, they were in high spirits all afternoon—chatting with people and helping children load their plates. Then smack in the middle of all that cold sunlight and warm gaiety, Frank 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 opposite edge of the table 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, those he bumped into and others, 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, with her elbows 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 and 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 made lace for a bridal veil and, after embroidering a linen tablecloth at the request of a well-to-do customer, her reputation grew. Receiving multiple special orders, she made up her mind 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 staring at the floor were unnerving. She tried; she really tried.

Every bit of housework—however minor—was hers: his clothes scattered on the floor; food encrusted dishes in the sink, catsup bottles left open, 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.

"Where were you?"

"Just out."

"Out where?"

"Down the Street."

Bar? Barbershop? Pool hall. He certainly wasn't sitting in the park.

"Frank, could you rinse the milk bottles before you put them on the stoop?"

"Sorry. I'll do it now."

"Too late. I've done it already. You know, I can't do everything."

"Nobody can."

"But you can do something, can't you?"

"Lily, please. I'll do anything you want."

"What I want? This place is ours."

The fog of displeasure surrounding Lily, thickened. Her resentment was justified by his clear indifference along with his combination of need and irresponsibility. Their bed work, once so satisfying to a young woman who had known no other, became 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 disgust fought with relief and lost. She picked up the dog tags he'd left on the bathroom sink and hid them away in a drawer next to her bankbook. Now the apartment was all hers she could clean properly, put things where they belonged and wake up knowing

they had not been moved or smashed to pieces. The loneliness she felt before Frank walked her home from Wang's Cleaners, began to dissolve and in its place a shiver of freedom, of earned solitude, of choosing the wall she wanted to break through, minus the burden of shouldering 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."

The afternoon Frank left, Lily moved to the front window, startled to see heavy snowflakes powdering the street. She decided to shop right away in case the weather became an impediment. Once outside she spotted a leather change purse on the sidewalk. Opening it she saw it was full of coins—mostly quarters and fifty cent pieces. Immediately she wondered if anybody was watching her.

Did the curtains across the street shift a little? The passengers in the car rolling by—did they see? Lily closed the purse and placed it on the porch post. When she returned with a shopping bag full of supplies the purse was still there although covered in a fluff of snow. Lily didn't look around. Casually she scooped it up and dropped it into the groceries. Later, spread out on the side of the bed where Frank slept, the coins, cold and bright, seemed more than fair trade. Not merely a sign but a signal.

7.

COLD. MORE THAN FREEZING. KOREA COLD HURTS
AND CLINGS LIKE GLUE ^A BUT YOU CAN'T PEEL ~~IT~~ OFF.

BATTLE IS SCAREY, YEAH, BUT IT'S ALIVE. ORDERS, GUT
QUICKENING, PROTECTING BUDDIES, KILLING—NO THINKING
NEEDED. WAITING IS THE HARD PART. DAYS AND DAYS PASS
DOING WHATEVER YOU ~~COULD~~ TO CUT THROUGH THE FLAT,
FLAT DAYS. WORST OF ALL IS SOLITARY GUARD DUTY. HOW
MANY TIMES CAN YOU TAKE OFF YOUR GLOVES TO ^{SEE} ~~EXAMINE~~
^{if} WHETHER YOUR FINGERNAILS ARE GOING BLACK OR ^{CHECK} ~~SHIFT~~
YOUR BROWNING. YOUR EYES ARE TRAINED TO SEE OR HEAR
MOVEMENT. IS THAT SOUND THE MONGOLIANS? THEY ARE
^{much} ~~FAR~~ WORSE THAN THE KOREANS. THE MONGOLS NEVER
QUIT; NEVER STOP. WHEN YOU THINK THEY ARE DEAD THEY
TURN OVER AND SHOOT YOU IN THE GROIN. EVEN IF YOU'RE
WRONG AND THEY'RE AS DEAD AS A DOPE HEAD'S EYES IT'S
WORTH THE WASTE OF AMMO TO MAKE SURE.

There I WAS
 ^

HOUR AFTER HOUR LEANING ON A MAKESHIFT WALL.

NOTHING TO SEE BUT A QUIET VILLAGE BELOW, NAKED HILLS

BEYOND, A TIGHT CLUSTER OF BAMBOO STICKING UP FROM ^{through}

SNOW PROTECTING MY LEFT. I STAYED ALERT AS BEST I

COULD LISTENING, WATCHING FOR ANY ^{sign of enemy} ~~HOSTILE~~ ACTIVITY.

^{Most of the time} NOTHING MOVED. ^{But} ONCE I HEARD CRACKLING IN THE ^{A thin}

BAMBOO STANDS. ^{A single something WAS moving} I KNEW IT WASN'T THE ENEMY—THEY

NEVER CAME IN ONES—SO I ^{figured} GUESSED IT WAS A TIGER.

WORD WAS THEY ROAMED UP IN THE HILLS BUT NO BODY

HAD SEEN ONE. THEN I SAW ~~MOVEMENT~~ IN THE BRAKES; A ^{part, low.}

DOG ^{maybe} FIGURED. NO. IT WAS A LITTLE HAND STICKING OUT

AND PATTING THE GROUND. I REMEMBER SMILING.

REMINDING ME OF CEE AND ME TRYING TO STEAL PEACHES

OFF THE GROUND UNDER MISS ELLEN'S TREE. SNEAKING,

CRAWLING QUIET AS WE COULD SO SHE WOULDN'T SEE US

AND GRAB A BELT. SO SINCE I DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO RUN HER

^{that} OFF THE FIRST TIME, ^{so} SHE CAME BACK ALMOST EVERY DAY,

~~THIS CHILD~~ CRAWLING THROUGH BAMBOO TO SCAVENGE
OUR TRASH. I SAW HER FACE ONLY ONCE. MOSTLY I JUST
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 DIRT FOR THE WORM SHE KNEW FOR SURE WAS
BURIED THERE.

SOMETIMES HER HAND WAS SUCCESSFUL RIGHT AWAY, AND
SNATCHED A PIECE OF GARBAGE IN A BLINK. OTHER TIMES
THE FINGERS JUST STRETCHED, PATTING, SEARCHING FOR
SOMETHING, ANYTHING, TO EAT. LIKE A TINY STARFISH—LEFT
HANDED, LIKE ME. I'VE WATCHED RACOONS MORE
CHOOSEY WITH 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
FIND 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 LOOKS LIKE A HURRIED,
EVEN AUTOMATIC, GESTURE SHE SAYS SOMETHING IN
KOREAN. SOUNDS LIKE 'YUM YUM'.

Transfer this section [] below to CHAP 12 tk 7

[SHE SMILES, REACHES FOR THE SOLDIER'S CROTCH, TOUCHES
IT. HIS 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 HER AWAY. ONLY THE HAND REMAINS,
CLUTCHING ITS TREASURE, A SPOTTED, ROTTING ORANGE.
EVERY CIVILIAN I EVER MET IN THAT COUNTRY WOULD (AND
DID) DIE TO DEFEND THEIR CHILDREN. STILL I KNEW THERE
WERE A FEW WHO MARKETED THEM. THINKING BACK ON IT

disgust

NOW, I THINK THE GUARD FELT MORE THAN REVULSION. I
 THINK HE FELT TEMPTED AND THAT IS WHAT HE HAD TO KILL.

YUM YUM. *here, man. Come on. Stay with me.* When Mike

opened his mouth to speak, Frank leaned in close and heard his
 friend say "I'm a tall 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

in his arms gave a grotesque life to memory. The shining of Lucky

Strikes and girls; they were Lotus boys who had known each other

before they were toilet trained, escaped Texas the same way, *it's believing*
the

smelling the same smoke from houses torched with unbelievable
of changed

malice. As children they had chased after straying cows,

made themselves a ball park in the woods, fumbled and suggested

their way into sex. As teens they made use of Miss K, the solitary

midwife, who depending on her mood, helped them hone their

sexual skills. Argued, fought, laughed, mocked and loved one

another without ever having to say so.

8.

He held Mike in his arms while he thrashed and jerked, whispering to him. "Stay here, man. Come on. Stay with me." When Mike opened his mouth to speak, Frank leaned in close and heard his friend say "I'm ^{Don't} ~~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 in his arms gave a grotesque life to memory. The sharing of Lucky Strikes and girls; they were Lotus boys who had known each other before they were toilet trained, escaped Texas the same way, ^{disbelieving the} ~~smelling the same smoke from houses torched with unbelievable~~ ^{of strangers} malignance. As children they had chased after straying cows, made themselves a ball park in the woods, fumbled and ^{giggled} ~~sniggered~~ their way into sex. As teens they made use of Miss K, the solitary widow, who depending on her mood, helped them hone their sexual skills. ^{They} Argued, fought, laughed, mocked and loved one another without ever having to say so. ~~was too little left of Red to~~

Frank had not been brave before. He had simply done 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 C 51 dropped its load on the enemies' nest. In the post blast silence the pleas wafted like the sound of a cheap cello coming from a shute of cattle smelling their blood-soaked future. Now ^{with Mike gone} he was brave, whatever that meant. There were not enough dead gooks or chinks in the world to satisfy him. The copper smell of blood no longer sickened him; it gave him appetite. ^{Then} ~~That was~~ after Red was pulverized and all of Stuff's blood emptied out from his blasted arm. Those two, Stuff and red, were especially close. "Neck" was dropped from Red's nickname because, ³hating northerners more than them, he preferred to associate with the three Georgia boys—Stuff most of all. Now they were meat.

Frank waited, oblivious of receding gunfire, until the medics left and the grave crew arrived. There was too little left of Red to

warrant the space of a whole stretcher, so they joined his remains with another corpse. Stuff had gotten a whole stretcher to himself, though, lay on it and died on it before the agony got to his brain.

Afterwards, for months on end, all he could think was "But I know them. I know them and they know me." If he heard a joke Mike would love, he would turn his head to tell it to him—then a nanosecond of embarrassment before realizing he wasn't there. Sometimes he saw his friend's profile in a car stopped in traffic until the heart jump of sorrow. Abrupt, unregulated memories put a watery shine in his eyes. His best friends, now the hovering dead he could neither talk to or laugh with.

But before that, before the deaths of his friends, he had witnessed the other one. The scavenging child clutching an orange, smiling, then saying "yum yum" before the guard blew her head off.

MTK ?

THE NOTE SAID 'SHE BE DEAD.' I DRAGGED MIKE BUT HE DIED
ANYWAY. I HELD ON TO HIM BUT HE DIED ANYWAY. NO
MORE SOMEBODIES I DIDN'T SAVE. NO MORE.

MY SISTER. MY STORY.

SHE WAS THE FIRST PROTECTION I EVER TOOK

9.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR. DOWN DEEP INSIDE HER LIVED MY

HER EYES. FLAT, WAITING, ALWAYS WAITING. NOT PATIENT,

NOT HOPELESS, BUT SUSPENDED. CEE. YCIDRA. MY SISTER.

NOW MY ONLY FAMILY. WHEN YOU WRITE THIS DOWN,

KNOW THIS: SHE WAS A SHADOW FOR MOST OF MY LIFE, A

PRESENCE MARKING ITS OWN ABSENCE, OR MAYBE MINE.

WHO AM I WITHOUT HER—THAT UNDERFED 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.

THE NOTE SAID 'SHE BE DEAD.' I DRAGGED MIKE BUT HE DIED
ANYWAY. I HELD ON TO HIM BUT HE DIED ANYWAY. NO
MORE SOMEBODIES I DIDN'T SAVE. NO MORE.

MY SISTER. MY STORY.

SHE WAS THE FIRST PROTECTION I EVER TOOK
RESPONSIBILITY FOR. DOWN DEEP INSIDE HER LIVED MY
SECRET ^{VIEW} VISION OF MYSELF—A SELF CONNECTED TO THE
MEMORY OF THOSE HORSES AND THE BURIAL OF A
STRANGER. GUARDING HER, FINDING A WAY ^{THROUGH TALL GRASS AND} OUT OF THAT
PLACE, NOT BEING AFRAID OF ANYTHING—SNAKES OR WILD
OLD MEN. SUCCEEDING AT THAT WAS THE ^{buried} 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. To Dr. Beau's house/rescue

Frank walked from the station toward
the busy part of town.

Blood spotted the back of her dress, ran down her leg. Frank
found himself grateful to be legally relegated to the back of the bus

to tablet
←

A hair dresser, a short order cook a woman called Thelma - finally he got the address. and the name of an unlicensed ^{cab} driver. ~~take him there~~
but before he could get there some teenagers beat the shit out of him. He liked Atlanta. Unlike ⁱⁿ Chicago the ^{face of} ^{every day} ^{life} was ^{human here} ~~different~~. Apparently ~~down here~~ ^{there} was time. Time to roll a cigarette just so; time to examine produce ^{with the eye of} ~~take~~ a diamond cutter. ~~looking~~ And time to gather outside a storefront and do nothing but watch their dreams go by: the cars of criminals and the hip-sway of women. Time, too, to instruct one another, pray for one another and chastise children in ^{the} ~~hundreds of~~ pews of a hundred churches. ^{It was} ^{that} That affection led him to wander. He'd had no breaks or nightmares for two days. ^{for the} ^{absence} ^{of CRAZY}
And he ^{was} ~~needed~~ desperate for ^{black} coffee in the morning or not ~~whiskey~~ the wake-up he believed whiskey ^{gave him} ~~provided~~. So ~~he~~
^{he} ~~would be parked~~ walked the streets. The ^{night} ~~evening~~ before the ^{taxi} ~~bus~~

where bench seats allowed the two of them space and protected passengers from the sight of a man carrying, dragging, an obviously beat up, drunken woman. Passengers in the front seats frowned, wrinkled their noses or simply cut their eyes in disgust.

When they got off the bus, it took a while to locate a jitney parked away from the licensed line of taxis in waiting, and more time to persuade a driver to accept the ruin of his back seats and take them to the edge of Lotus. With the promised generous tip given, they struggled out of the jitney. By then Cee's feet had stopped working. Her toes scooted the gravel as the tops of her feet were dragged on the street to Miss Ethel Fordham's house. Frank picked her up and carrying his sister in his arms, mounted the porch steps. A group of children stood in the road fronting the yard watching a girl bat a paddle ball like a pro. When they noticed 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 lay 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."

11

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 silence it: children still laughed, ran, shouted their games; women sang in their back yards while pinning wet sheets on clothes lines; occasionally a soprano is joined by a neighboring alto or a tenor just passing by—"What a friend we have in Jesus." 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, peppermint, chrysanthemums. The sun did its best to burn away the comfort, the relief found under wide, old trees; 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. Fuller 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 real. He convinced himself that somewhere nearby pork ribs sizzled on a yard grill and inside the house there was potato salad and coleslaw and early sweet peas too. A pound cake rested on top of the icebox. And he was certain that beyond Lotus, on the bank of a stream they called Wretched, a woman in a man's hat fished.

Reaching the cotton fields, he saw acres of pink blossoms spread under the malevolent sun. They would turn red and drop to the ground in a few days to let the young boll^s through. The planter would need help for the laying by and Frank would be in line, then and again for the picking when it was time. Like all hard labor, picking cotton broke the body but freed the mind for dreams of vengeance,

images of illegal pleasure—even ambitious schemes of escape.

Cutting into these big thoughts were the little ones. Another

medicine for the baby? What to do about an uncle's foot swollen

so large he can't put it in a shoe. Will the landlord be satisfied with

half the rent this time?

While waited for the hiring

When Frank ~~was hired~~ all he thought about was whether Cee

was getting better. Her boss back in Atlanta had done something—

what he didn't know—to her female parts and she was fighting a

fever that wouldn't stay down. The calamus root Miss Ella

depended on wasn't working, that he did know. But that was all he

knew, since he was blocked from visiting the sick room by every

woman in the neighborhood. Apparently they believed his

maleness exacerbated her condition. The women took turns nursing

Cee and each had a recipe for her cure. What they all agreed

upon was his absence from her bedside. Miss Ethel didn't even

want him on her porch.

"Go somewhere," she told him, "and stay gone till I call for you."

Frank thought the woman looked a little scared. "Don't you let her die," he said. "Hear me?"

"Get out," she waved him away. "You not helping with that evil mind-set."

So he busied himself cleaning and repairing his parents' house that had been empty since his father died. With the Samaritan's money he had just enough to re-rent it for a few months, so when the white blossoms became pink, he headed down the rows of cotton to the shed that the farm manager called his office. He hated this place once. As a boy assigned to trash work while his parents were far away in the productive fields his mouth was dry with anger. He messed up as much as he could so they would fire him. They did. His father's scoldings didn't matter because he and Cee were free to invent ways to occupy that timeless time when the world was new.

If she died because some arrogant, evil doctor sliced her up, war memories would pale beside what he would do to him. Even if it took the rest of his life, even he spent the balance of it in prison. So he joined the other pickers who planned sweet vengeance under the sun.

It was early June by the time Miss Ethel sent a child to tell him he could stop by, and July when Cee was well enough to move into their parents' home. (over)

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

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

"Bad?"

She was different. Two months surrounded
by Country women who loved mean did
something to her. They handled picknens
as though it was a stranger, ^{an} invading,
devious braggart who needed whipping.
So they didn't waste ^{their} time ^{or the patient's time} with sympathy
or finding fault.

First the bleeding: This is going to hurt. Hush.

Then the infection: Drink this. You puke you have to
drink more, so don't.

Then the repair: Hold it. The burning is the healing.
Be quiet.

Later, when ^{the} fever died and whatever it was
they packed into her vagina was douched out,
she let them know the little she knew about
what had happened to her. None of them had
asked. Once they knew she ~~was~~ working
for a doctor, ~~they rolled their eyes~~ the eye-rolling
and tooth-sucking ^{was enough}. And nothing
she ~~remembered~~ ^{remembered} - how ^{pleasant} she felt upon ^{waking} after
shot ^{to} and put her asleep, how ^{carefully} he explained the
value of the examinations - made them change their
ments about the medical industry. She thought the
(to back of p. 113)

"No. You looking good. Feeling better?"

"I'll say. 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?"

eventual pain & bleeding was a menstrual
problem - as was ^{my} fatigue.

-> Want a live birth?

"People over in Jeffrey, Mount Haven. Miss Johnson from Good Shepherd buys them from us and markets them to tourists down 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 know how to can and anything else I need I go outside and pick, gather or kill it."

Frank laughed. Cee was very different now. Stronger.

Independent. Not the girl who trembled at the slightest touch of the real and vicious world. Nor was she the fifteen year old who would marry the first boy who asked her. And not the household help who believed whatever happened to her while drugged was a good idea, good because a white coat said so. Frank didn't know

what took place during those weeks at Miss Ethel's house surrounded by those women with seen-it-all eyes. Their contempt for the world always on display. Their devotion to each other centered them placed them high above their lot in life. They delivered unto him a Cee who would never again need his hand over her eyes or his arms to stop her murmuring bones.

"What happened to that place we used to sneak off to? Remember? They had some horses over there."

"I remember. 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[joining men playing checkers]

"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 funnel 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 Fordham 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."

13 "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?"

[That would be the last thing on her mind.]

14
12

"Here stands a man." [I'm leaving Lotus land. Lily won't come

[Wrong]

down here. I don't want to go back there. You know me, now. I'm
my own story. Watch out.]

13

Burial with quilt [sees back of zoot suit man walking away,
swinging his watch chain.]

Cee didn't want to give up the quilt. Frank wanted it for something, something bothering him. The quilt was the first one she had helped make. As soon as she could sit up without pain or bleeding, neighbor women joined her in the sick room and started sorting pieces while they discussed her medications and the most useful prayers Jesus would take notice of. They sang, too, while they stitched together the palette they had agreed upon.

tk

14

"Here stands a man." [I'm leaving Lotus land. Lily won't come down here. I don't want to go back there. You know me, now. I'm my own story. Watch out.]

