

GALLEYS

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ONLINE JOURNAL OF LITERATURE

What We're Reading
Gertrude Stein's
Melanctha on its
100th Anniversary

The Ghost of the
Wisest Child:
Understanding
Seymour and Buddy
Glass

Debut Poetry By:
Andrea DeAngelis
Brittany Durk
KJ
Jeff Klooger
Duane Locke
Kenneth Pobo
M. Rather, Jr.

Debut Fiction By:
L.P. Currier
Terence Kuch
Carrie Ann Riddell
Meg Tuite

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Galleys Online's mission is to shape the future of literary writing by debuting new voices as well as new work by established voices. Additionally, Galleys Online seeks to re-establish the writing community free from the influences of mainstream publishing houses, pay-for-service Writers' Workshops, and commercially-motivated critics.

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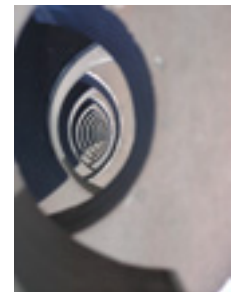
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On The Cover ...

Photo: New Perspective by Jessica Lamarre.

About the Photographer

Jessica Lamarre is a Youth Services Librarian with a degree from Northeastern University. When you don't find her nose in a book, she's behind the camera. Her aesthetic interests include abstract and macro photography, and she finds her subjects primarily among what's left behind on the Boston streets when the snow melts. Ms. Lamarre loves photography because anyone can photograph the same object, but it will always have a different perspective. Plus, she really stinks at painting.



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CONTRIBUTORS

L.P. Currier is a student at Northeastern University. She grew up on a cattle ranch her family still operates in western Colorado. Following high school, she began working in the oil shale mines that started up in Colorado because of the Arab Oil Embargo crisis. When the mines proved unprofitable and closed down, she drove north to Alaska in 1984. In Alaska, she first worked in Bering Sea offshore wildcat exploration, and then transferred to the North Slope oilfields on the shores of the Beaufort Sea where she works as a drilling planner.

Andrea DeAngelis has recently her writing in *The Battered Suitcase*, *Frostwriting*, *Dogmatika*, 50 to 1, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Salome*, *Terracotta Typewriter* and *Zygote in my Coffee*. She also sings and plays guitar in an indie rock band called MAKAR (www.makarmusic.com).

Brittany Durk has been writing since the tender age of six, when she wrote (and bound with cardboard and string) a book about a snowman. Then, very boldly, she asked the local librarian if he would allow other children to check said book out of the neighborhood library. She enjoys both becoming possessed by reading and being slapped around by writing, fiction, creative non-fiction, science fiction and poetry. She has presumptuously distributed and performed two poetry chapbooks in days past, published some poems here and there (check out the winter issue of *Clockwise Cat*), and is currently trying to get her short stories out into the free world for all to enjoy (or not). She is also currently working on the second draft of a long and very self-deprecating book about love, loss and degradation. She makes her bed in New York City.

Jacqueline Hughes holds a BA in Art History from SUNY-New Paltz and an Associates Degree in Liberal Arts from SUNY-Dutchess, where she won the DUE Award for Academic Excellence. She is also certified from Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School in New York

City.

She served on the Board of Directors of Mill Street Loft and volunteered as a locent at Mills Mansion in Staatsburg, duties including researching, scripting, and acting in the Mansion's theater productions for public and Friends. At Barbizon School of Modeling, she taught modeling, drama, and business. Affiliations include "Walkway-over-the-Hudson" and the Mid-Hudson Bicycle Club. In 2007 Hudson Valley Federal Credit Union honored her as a "Legend of the Hudson Valley" for her artistic donations to Black History Month Celebrations.

Permanent installations include Teddy Bear murals for the Child Abuse Prevention Center; a 20'x12' mural of "How a Tree Becomes a Book" for HAMCO, Netpub; and "Madonna and Child" painting at St. Estaban's, Jamaica, WI.

KJ lives in California with his dog, Mr. Bear. Some of his publication credits include: *Decomp Magazine*, *Yellow Mama*, *Gutter Eloquence*, *Troubadour 21*, *why vandalism?*, and *The Flea*. He works easy at his love's labor here: <http://illegalfunk.blogspot.com>.

Jeff Klooger's poetry has been published in Australian and international online and print journals. Recently his work has appeared in *The Liberal*, *Harvest*, *dotdotdash*, *Words-Myth* and *Pure Francis*. His other interests are music and philosophy. His book on the ideas of the Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis was published in 2009.

Terence Kuch is a consultant, avid hiker, and world traveler. His checkered publication career includes *Clockwise Cat*, *Commonweal*, *Dissent*, *Marginalia*, *New York magazine*, *North American Review*, *Northwest Review*, *The Realist*, *Slow Trains*, *Thema*, and *Timber Creek Review*. He has studied at the Writers Center, Bethesda, Maryland, and participated in the *Mid-American Review Summer Fiction Workshop*.



butterflies, birds, Opera, Mahler, and Viennese music.

Jessica Lamarre is a Youth Services Librarian with a degree from Northeastern University. When you don't find her nose in a book, she's behind the camera. Her aesthetic interests include abstract and macro photography, and she finds her subjects primarily among what's left behind on the Boston streets when the snow melts. Ms. Lamarre loves photography because anyone can photograph the same object, but it will always have a different perspective. Plus, she really stinks at painting.

Duane Locke lives hermetically by ancient oak, an underground stream, and an osprey's nest in rural Lakeland, Florida.

He has of August 2009, 6,401 different poems published in print magazines, American Poetry Review, Nation ,etc. and e zines, Counter Example Poetics, Pen Himalaya (Nepal) and 21 books of poems. His three latest books, 2009, are Yang Chu's Poems (376 pp.) Crossing Chaos, Canada (order from publisher or Amazon); Voices from a Grave (40 pp.) erbacce, England (order from erbacce), and Soliloquies from a High Wall Hidden Cemetery (37 pp.) Differentia Press, California (Free download, www.differentiapress.com) .

Has interviews in Counter Example Poetics, Eviscerator Heaven, Pen Himalaya, Ann Arbor Review, and Bitter Oleander. For more information click "Duane Locke" on Google Search, over 500,000 entries. Is in Who's Who in America (Marquis).

He is also a painter and photographer. An account of his painting is in Gary Monroe's Extraordinary Interpretations (U of FL press). His sur-photos are scattered throughout the internet, and he has done many book covers. Has a Ph. D, specializing in English Metaphysical Poetry.

His interest are philosophy (PostModern, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger), Insects,

Kenneth Pobo won Main Street Rag's 2009 poetry chapbook contest for his manuscript called Trina and the Sky. It should be out in November. Also coming out this year is another chapbook called Something To Be Said, an online collection, from Flutter Press. Influences on my poetry are many, including classical Chinese poetry, Tomas Tranströmer, D.H. Lawrence's Pansies, Emily Dickinson, The Beats, Bette Davis (especially in Whatever Happened To Baby Jane).

M. Rather, Jr. is currently pursuing a MFA in Creative Writing and a MA in English Literature from McNeese State University. He teaches composition classes part time and holds degrees from the University of Iowa and High Point University. His poems have appeared in the anthology A Generation Defining Itself (Volume 7) and Reed Magazine, in the monthly Artscene published by the Des Moines Register, and on-line at Idioplexicon, 12th Planet, and Adagio Verse Quarterly.

Carrie Ann Riddell is a 42 year old mother of seven, residing in Scotland. She has had limited recent publishing success in a number of online and print publications including The Cynic, Flash Fiction Offensive, OOTG magazine and Secret Attic Magazine and is currently attempting to break into the more experimental and literary markets.

Meg Tuite just got back from the Tin House Writer's summer workshop, where she worked with Dorothy Allison. She has a flash fiction piece coming out in the Fall 2009 issue of Boston Literary Review, Screaming Midnight Magazine, Fall 2009 issue, as well as Fractured West out of the UK. She won a cash prize in the fiction contest at Santa Fe College that will be appearing in the special Fall 2009 contest issue. She is currently putting together a collection of short stories to publish in book form. ¶



The End Table

Introducing Galleys Online

In the early days of printing press technology, when a manuscript's type was set by hand using galleys, or metal composing sticks, publishers required the printer to return short-run proofs before they committed to a mass publishing run. Though slow, anyone tasked with delegating any responsibility will certainly recognize the necessity of these extra steps. When transcribing from a handwritten manuscript, pressmen are capable of mistakes, inverting their e's with their i's or misreading g's as j's. If the pressmen were overseen by personalities like my former managers, I'm sure they accepted more than their fair share of blame during this process as copy editors would insist, the original copy is clean.

As the technology of printing continues to advance, galleys remain as an early stage of the process so that publishers can advance copies to reviewers, marketers, and wholesale buyers before the final manuscript meets the public-at-large. To be concise (if not entirely pretentious), galleys preview writing's future.

That's what we hope to accomplish here at Galleys: to preview the writers and ideas of the future; to build reputations and offer recognition for authors who do not write mainstream, marketable literature and do not have the proper contacts among the esteemed publishers of literature.

We vow to publish monthly rather than Quarterly; our only limitations are your submissions.

We vow to profit share; we are starting small with no financial backing from a corporation or an angel investor. For the moment, our only revenue comes from Google Ads (please visit our Google sponsors often). So, for the moment we cannot project our gross income or intelligently dedicate funds to compensate our writers. We will, however, contractually commit ourselves to share Ad Revenue with our published authors. And yes, that means we are will to be fully transparent about our sources of income.

We vow to build our presence in the literary market so that to be published by Galleys Online carries weight. Yes, that means we will apply high standards when we make a publishing decision.

We vow to be a resource for young and unpublished writers. If we choose to not publish your submitted writing, we will tell you why and we will tell you quickly. When we receive a submission, we will personally email you to confirm your submission and to establish our self-imposed deadline to respond. To prepare for our first issue, we will offer a full critical response within days. (Note: If a struggling screenwriter finds himself reading this page, navigate to Abbot Management, where you will receive the same free courtesy as Galleys



offers. We have no affiliation with Abbot Management; we simply use and endorse their service.)

Seeking and Serving ...

Galleys Online seeks previously unpublished poems, short stories, flash fiction, and personal essays for publication in our monthly journals. Additionally, we seek unpublished novellas and novels for serial publication. (We might also appreciate your submissions of photography and artwork for our cover art.) Unlike our competition, we promise to respond to your submissions in days, not weeks or months, with a detailed reader-based critique if we choose to not immediately accept your work for publication. Email us your cover letter and submissions as MS-Word, txt, or rtf files, or visit our Submissions page for more details.

More, Galleys seeks to re-establish the writing community free from the influences of mainstream publishing houses, pay-for-service Writers' Workshops, and commercially-motivated critics. Our Writers' Forum, named Annotations, offers a unique opportunity to build traditional writing skills, experiment with new forms of vision and expression, and exercise your voice with Challenges and Exercises like "So It Goes" and "tw*t" when you otherwise lack a motivating idea. Though we offer a basic protection to your materials' copyrights,* we also offer every registered user to Annotations an opportunity to establish a private writing forum that allows you to easily share your writing with only the members you

invite.

While we hope to shape the future of literary writing by debuting new voices, we don't dismiss the value of experienced writers to help mentor our young on the forums, and we don't discriminate against your experience when considering your submissions for publication. If you are an experienced author, we will gladly consider your unpublished writing while promoting the Hell out of your new relationship with our little company. The alternate definition of galleys (a naval vessel propelled by the hard work of oarsmen for the glory of the captain) is not lost on us, after all. ¶

About Our Founder

Dan Branda, editor-in-chief of Galleys Online and founder of Whortlekill ePress, also teaches writing and American Literature in the English Department for Northeastern University's College of Professional Studies where he developed his work shopping skills and theories by expanding on Peter Elbow's Power of Voice. Dan received an M.A. in English from Iona College in 2006 and a B.A. in English from Northeastern University in 2002. He has served as editorial assistant for SIGS/101 conferences and for Northeastern's Spectrum Literary Magazine, but otherwise wasted much of his professional life at Sears until common sense and sad, vindictive personalities intervened.



Best of Annotations



The Soap Box

Annotation's own version of Speaker's Corner. Speak your mind on just about any topic of your choosing. Do keep it polite, however. Remember, we're here first and foremost to build professional relationships with other writers, agents, and publishers.

WRITERS' WORKSHOP



Novel Workshop

A place to workshop your Novels. Here you can either request private readers or post your work to the group. Be sure, though, that you read and fully accept the Copyright notice and implications.



Short Story Workshop

A place to workshop your Short Stories. Here you can either request private readers or post your work to the group. Be sure, though, that you read and fully accept the Copyright notice and implications.



Poetry Workshop

A place to workshop your poetry. Here you can either request private readers or post your work to the group. Be sure, though, that you read and fully accept the Copyright notice and implications.

Beginning with Issue 2, this space will feature the Best of Annotations, in which Contributions to the Writing Exercises and Critical Corners will be highlighted.

For our first issue, it seems important to preview the different forums within Annotations and to discuss how we hope the site is used by writers.

We intend “The Lobby” to be something of a social gathering place where writers will assemble each day to discuss the goings-on in their lives and the world. Here, new members can introduce themselves to the group and established writers can announce deals they have struck. We have the Critics Corner, where we hope visitors will discuss the works published in this magazine, as well as what they are reading in general. We hope the Critics Corner will be the anchor of Galleys Online, that readers are so inspired by the contents of this magazine that they need to discuss their

impressions and their reactions and that our authors take the opportunity to interact with their readers. The best exchanges will be published monthly among our Correspondences.

The Soap Box is our own virtual Speaker's Corner. Sure, we might be capitalizing on the current divisive political climate. At the same time, writers are traditionally both the social conscience and the recorders of history and convention. As much as the writing of Charles Dickens is a product of his time, he also reveals that time to us 200 years later. Gertrude Stein's *Melanctha* recreates the prejudices of 1909 Baltimore to reveal to us the flaws and limitations within these prejudices.

The Writing Exercises forum for Prose and Poetry offers quick prompts. For example, in the Off-Stage exercise, we ask the author to tie his own hands, to reveal the character by preventing action. Sophocles could not stage Oedipus's blinding, nor could Shakespeare



parade Macduff's army onto the stage en route to confronting the usurper. Instead, Sophocles and Shakespeare needed to capture the drama of the moment by projecting the anxiety of the character on stage. Your character waits at home, in the office, or in the car stuck in traffic. He knows that at this very moment, an event that he cannot participate in may dramatically change his life. How is your character's behavior affected by the weight? What goes through his mind? Now add a second character, someone who has nothing invested in this event, who may not even know about the event. How do these two characters interact?

Among poetry exercises, we ask you to try to confine your lines to traditional forms, whether it be the sonnet or the rondeau or the sijo. We're not traditionalists, and we offer Free Verse exercises as well. However, like the Off-Stage exercise, we feel that when a writer restricts himself with arbitrary, pre-constructed rules, he challenges his mind and his verse to be better in the final draft, whether he retains the rules, breaks them, or changes them.

While the Critics' Corner will be the anchor of Galleys Online, the Workshop will be the lifeblood of our community.

Modeled in part on Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope community, the Workshops will allow new writers and unpublished writers to share and improve their work without spending hundreds of dollars on a professional workshop or to travel to a writing convention.

As a writing teacher at Northeastern

University, I take Workshopping very seriously. Within almost all writing, there is the promise of a published work.

Nowhere is the principle more evident than in the contents of this Journal. Approximately half the works published here were rejected for publication in their original form. Hopefully, each work has been improved due to the presence of an experienced and objective reader. (Though, I will not dismiss that they simply fit better into what this Editor believes Literature should be.) However, several published works, here and elsewhere, can be better when that one objective, constructive reader is joined by ten or twenty more readers, and the writer can accept or reject differing feedback based on the singular purpose of his personal artistic vision.

Exposing unpolished writing to these voices should be the purpose of any workshop. Within the community lies the workshop's value. So, it makes no sense to pay an entry fee for a workshop because that value is not exclusive to any sole proprietor. No instructor alone can succeed in turning the aspiring into the accomplished. Yet, turning a profit on aspiring writers is precisely the purpose of most Workshops, who offer the "valuable experience" of instructors who could just as soon be students, who would not be employed by an accredited university yet still manage to prey upon dreams.

The next time you visit a bookstore, take a look at the Writing section. Aspiring writers are big business. That need not be the case. ¶



SPEAKING OF REPRESENTATION
IN OUR POST-POSTMODERN TIMES

§

Duane Locke

I.

The sound of bells, church bells

In Tampa slum
Neighborhood, a church among crime streets

That subordinates hired by hired city planners
Have produced an expensive document
That this church
Is among the streets that have the city's

Highest
Crime rate--one street, a type of Wall Street
Where affluent illegal business men meet to observe
The stock market reports

On the importing,
Exporting, and sales of crack cocaine, and who
To pay
Off.



Last week, the native American who lived across
The street and sat as he said his grandfather did
On a stump was murdered during an argument
About a thirty percent discount on a drug deal.

The sound of bells from a church that is High
Church,
 Episcopalian,
 English influenced,
The priest wears stiff-starched collars backwards
And a thin-clothed black coat. He is a stranger to me,
A poet, although the bell-ringing church is only one
Block
 Away. The church, now a dislocation, a type
Of anachronism in this new dispensation. As dislocated
And anachronistic
 As I am
 In any dispensation.

I recall a bell bird, a blue-white bird, in the Bronx
Zoo,
 I was happy a long time ago, although happiness
Is always
Truncated but partially happy

Touching her, a Slavic Teutonic blonde,
We lived in a foliage fantasy, listened to an aural fantasy
Of a jungle, a Henri Rousseau
 Fiction

In the Bronx
Bell bird ringing zoo.

I hear in my embodied mind, bells.

Tzara's bells,



Tzara's bells.

The beloved bells of Tristan Tzara,
The bells that ring for no reason,
Ring for no reason,
Ring for no reason.

Tristan Tzara whose monocle and antics were my saviors.
Tristan Tzara, whose Approximate Man inspired me
To become a poet,
Develop
A detheologized *contemptus mundi*,

Transvaluate Søren Kierkegaard, take a leap,
Become a "knight of no faith."

A bell for Adano, a bell to replace a bell melted
To make bullets or machines to murder.

A bell for Theodor Ardono, a funeral bell
For the Frankfurt school.

A bell for Adami, Valrico (*qu'un homme se retire.*)
A bell for Jacques Derrida.

II.

A prelate's neck:

A leak

In the late show--

Silver, ebony rain streaks slant on a rectangular quivering screen.
Perhaps this is not the general situation, the absolute, universal
Fictionized situation, but in any case,



It is my situation, my here and now, the radical singularity of my
Concretely, empirical observable, particularized embodied moment.

It is not a universal occurant (Heidegger) for next door the TV set
Is working and there is a clicking of light beer bottles in celebration
Of a field goal being missed, too far right. A man in denims stepped
Through the window out onto his roof, and danced a tango for one.

The church bells and Tzara's bells are still ringing.

But my TV is out of order.

The prelate lost

His face,

His eyes, nose, mouth are below his shoulders. He is headless, galloping,

Galloping without

Any horse.

The prelate's collar crawls, as if a carnival commodified caterpillar on steel rails
Painted green to simulate leaves or a dragon (St. George-less) flying
As kite. The collar confused, circled counter clockwise, preached the wrong
Sermon, preached the Diamond Sutra. Pablo Neruda observed
The prelate's collar was stained with semen.

III.

I still watch, paying the cable company, watch something else than what was
Advertised that would appear to be watched, but this confusion of

Blank silver spaces, crisscrossing varied shaped lines, all sizes and shapes of dots, but
Communicated better

Than the lies that were scripted, revised by a committee, the language of lies copied from
The language of lies that the people, the slave mentalities, speak--all simulated.

The set out of order was communicating through lines, masses, light effect,



GALLEYS ONLINE

Color effects, and sounds as from a musical composition by Nono, Berio
Or Stockhauser,
An aesthetic experience that elicited deep emotions and profound feelings.

These disjunctions, these distortions, these aporias
Cognitive unconscious of my embodied mind. Were speaking to the

Watching this distinct existent, this particular empirical, temporal moment, every
Utterance paralinguistic and actually communicative,

I had to confront and evaluate
The vanity of the language that is spoken by people,
This meaningless language of street and educated talk--signifiers without
Signifieds .

IV.

So I watch a TV screen that is out of order, that is malfunctioning. Its
Non-representational aspects:
Disturbance, its discontinuity. Its slipperiness, its disjunction, its narrative
Non-representational aspects Its alinearity, its fragmentation--All its
Cognitive unconscious Meaningfully communicates to the
Of my embodied mind.

Now, if the set had been in order, functioning perfectly in a mechanical sense,
There would be only triviality and prevarications on the screen, clear and distinct,
A falsification of the

Real--a simulation of life.

The depiction on the screen would have been as dangerous as a priest, a



Professor, or a parent

With a belief in traditional, conventional, quotidian

Eternal truths.

I thought when this set is working it appeals to the old falsities, the old lies,
Appeals to the mind, the old

False

Version of the mind, the Platonic-

Cartesian mind,

The disembodied mind,

But out of order it appeals to corporeal perception, and the Merleau-Ponty
Body,

The George Lakoff cognitive science body that

Knows more, can comprehend more than the disembodied minds of Plato

And

Descartes.

Out of order, the TV set is no longer exempt from meaning.

Out or order, the TV set is no longer pernicious
Wits moribund axiologies.

So I interrogate the affront

of language's generalizing, conceptualizing, uni-
Versilizing

Properties, both public and private.

We must rethink everything we were taught to believe, for what we were taught
To believe

Is false,

For it was based on the misconception

That the mind

Is disembodied.



IV.

A neck, a blur, a stretch of a neck, the stretched neck has Zebra stripes, a prelate's
Neck

Sags,

Wrinkles, grows one eye, the one eye winks, half of the one eye
See a mystic, other-worldly vision: a girl with blonde hanging curls and wings,
Her slender fingers, silver-painted
Fingernails play a silver stringed, silver-framed harp,

But

Before music begins, the prelate's face returns. He is proclaiming
Some mumbles ex cathedra,

But his face subdivides, resembles a face

In a painting of Francis Bacon or a passage

In Francis Bacon's

New Atlantis,

The prelate's face now has no chin, the prelate
Again has no face,

The prelate

Has only a scrap of a collar or

Caller, as some critics would have George Herbert's "Collar." At times,
Due to the malfunctioning
Of the TV,

The collar

Resembles

A

Gothic

White

Worm.

V.



I hear a vague background noise. It could be someone reading a Meditation
Of John Donne, “No man is an island,” or perhaps

It was someone
Reading from the opening pages of *For Whom the Bells Tolls*.

The bells tolls without reason.

Did I mishear, substituting what was familiar for what was actually said,
As is done

Constantly
In our quotidian lives, mishearing so I will hear what I want to hear.

Perhaps, this fuzzy background voice was saying:

“Every person is an island.”

“Meaning human intersubjectivity is either negligible or nonexistent.
Intersubjectivity is an illusion. Everyone is a prison of his radical
Particularity. Everyone is solitary and self-enclosed, and squanders
His sparse intelligence on producing lies to prove that he or her is not.”

Now, the prelate could not have said such truth, it must have been
An interpolation,
An interference, an intrusion

From some underground, non-
Power structure station.

VI.

I keep hearing all these intruding voices:

“The mind cannot exist without the body. Reason is not independent of
Emotion. We have falsely believed for centuries that there is a mind
That exist apart from the body. We have falsely believed in a



Transcendent reason.”

Something is wrong with this set. I am going to call

The Cable company.

The Cable company can make the mouth speak what is suppose to speak,
Not speak something else.

I must, I’m desperate, I must call the Cable company.

VII.

The prelate is back. He has a neck, but a misty neck.
All his features are fuzzy.

I have no desire (unless Cartesian innate) or Freudian and
Jungian unconscious (both victims of Platonic-Cartesian thinking in their conception
Of a disembodied, archetypical or universal unconscious)

To return

To the myth of objective reality, or Aristotle’s theory of mimetic
Representations.

VIII.

I have no desire to resurrect, resuscitate the dead Correspondence
Theory of truth. Or, the false Coherence theory of truth.

I am exerting much effort to get rid of all the *a priori* assumptions

That have been spoken into me by others. I’m studying
Jacques Lacan,



Aspiring to exorcise what people have spoken into me.

I must unlearn all I ever learned from the people,
From popular opinion, from whatever is fashionable.

IX.

All life, opaque; all internal and external reality unknowable, all art,
Auratic.

X.

Sometimes for a short time, the prelate's neck is pale and bloodless;
Is a pencil sketch
Of the outlines of a neck,
Sometimes for a short time,

The prelates neck has color, no longer varied gray shades,
The prelate's has a particularized

Red

Color, a shade of red

Only otherwise seen

In

The flame colors

Of the Ben Dainagon scroll, Japanese,
Late Heinan period, 12 century,

A. D.

The neck color seems a miracle. How could a distortion
In a 21st Century TV set

Invent the identical, once exclusive and
Unique, red tint

Of a 12th Century A. D. Japanese.

But it did. It did.



Now the color of the red neck has changed to a more
Familiar shade of red, a red combined with vermilion,
The shade is flame colored, colored like the fire
That burned Giodano Bruno. The black marks on the screen
Look as if they were charred stakes.

XI.

The whole history of Christianity might
Have been altered
As it was altered,
If In the election of Roman bishops, pa-pa's,
Valentinus, the Gnostic, had been elected back in those
Ancient days.

The stress would have shifted from feet washing
To
Jesus kissing Mary Magdalene full on the mouth.

But our TV distorted prelate would have been
Deracinated, truncated,

For now he has only
A stretched neck,
No face, no
Mouth
For kissing,

For the Osculation of Suspicion.

He has only a headless neck and a scrap of a starched collar.

But the sages have prognosticated that if Valentius had been elected
That Christianity



Would have become extinct, for Gnosticism was too
Learned,
Too influenced by the Neo-Platonists--Plotinus, Proclus,
Porphyry, Iamblichus.

The Gnostic cosmology was too complex with its Pleroma,
Sophia,
to ever attract faith and belief
From the simple-minded, slave-mentality, quotidian citizens.

Only the diluted, the superficial, the obtuse, the false
Are believed, revered, worshipped, and perpetuated by the
The people, the slave mentalities.

XII.

I sit, perplexed about representation in our 21st century. I sip
A wine from Montepulciano, vin nobil.

No, it's

Brunello from Montacino.

No, it's Campari.

There is always a gap between theoretical Interpretation and
The real world. We can only experience the present, even
The present is uncertain and fleeing. The present passes
Before we can grasp its presence. The past is only a conceptual
Approximation, a guess. The future is always a fiction, a non-
Existent.

I sit here in an Italian chair made in Viet Nam. The chair
Was copied from a photograph of a chair

In

Venice' Palazzo Ducale. The origin of the photo sits
In a room frescoed by Tintoretto. I sit



In its simulation,
 Sipping the unknown,
 Thinking about

Such topics as

The Frankfurt School, Can there be poetry after Auschwitz, the
Foucauldian episteme, power structure puppet-masters, Mallarme's
Un coup de de,

 And Garica Lorca's duende.

I

Am trying to dispel, exorcise this myth
 Of objective reality

I seek extirpation from code-makers, popular systems,
Parlor room, a locker room necessity,
The myth Of
Objective reality.

Objective reality is as extinct as the DoDo Bird, pasquinades,
Passenger pigeons, extra-terrestrial referents, and the extra-
Physical.

XIII.

I sit here knowing that the lie, this myth of an objective
World is extinct,
But yet this lie has more power than the truth. There are no
Ideas, but in things,
But there are no things. There are only representations,
Simulations of things. What we call a "Ding" is some-
Thing else.

I am sitting here in a lie, a myth, an objective world,



An illusion,
Guarded by the flaming swords of Marx and Engels..

Last night, I read Bergson, but always forgot what
He said about duration,

So I look at my Japanese \$25 watch that knows more
About duration than my \$1,200 Rolex, and this low-priced savant
Says:

SA, 10-19, 8:30 AM--22 seconds, 1992.

I notice that I am still wearing my toga. I came home
Late from a Dionysian celebration,

Or did I come home late from a Symposium, drunk,
Barefooted, I have a vague
Memory of someone named Socrates
Quoting Diotima on the nature of authentic love.
I recall the intrusion
Of Alicibiades.

XIII.

The prelate's neck is gone,
Excommunicated
By a flash of lightning.

The church bell is still ringing

Tristan Tzara's bells are still ringing,
Ringing for no reason,

Ringing for no reason. ¶





*Birthin' It -
Remembering Katrina*
24"x36" Oil on Canvas

Artist:

Jacqueline Hughes

Benefactor:

Melissa Russo

Artist's Statement

The young girl represents New Orleans after Katrina. Intensity of the storm reflects in her face and resilience of the city's survivors is reflected in the strength of her actions. Her mission is the preservation of a famous culture, the saxophone for its hypnotic music and beads for its pulsing festivals. Alone, she carries out the memory of those lost. Surrounded by a sea of mud and rubble, she meets the future with determination. On the left, sky meets water in an on-going storm front, but the right horizon is full of light and promise. The saxophone will wail through New Orleans again. ¶



Melanctha



Getrude Stein

EACH ONE AS SHE MAY

Rose Johnson made it very hard to bring her baby to its birth.

Melanctha Herbert who was Rose Johnson's friend, did everything that any woman could. She tended Rose, and she was patient, submissive, soothing, and untiring, while the sullen, childish, cowardly, black Rosie grumbled and fussed and howled and made

herself to be an abomination and like a simple beast. The child though it was healthy after it was born, did not live long. Rose Johnson was careless and negligent and selfish, and when Melanctha had to leave for a few days, the baby died. Rose Johnson had liked the baby well enough and perhaps she just forgot it for awhile, anyway the child was dead and Rose and Sam her husband were very sorry but then these things came so often in the negro world in Bridgepoint, that they neither of them thought about it very long.

Rose Johnson and Melanctha Herbert had been friends now for some years. Rose had lately married Sam Johnson a decent honest kindly fellow, a deck hand on a coasting steamer.

Melanctha Herbert had not yet been really married.

Rose Johnson was a real black, tall, well built, sullen, stupid, childlike, good looking negress. She laughed when she was happy and grumbled and was sullen with everything that troubled.

Rose Johnson was a real black negress but she had been brought up quite like their own child by white folks. Rose laughed when she was happy but she had not the wide, abandoned laughter that makes the warm broad glow of negro sunshine. Rose was never joyous

with the earth-born, boundless joy of negroes. Hers was just ordinary, any sort of woman laughter.

Rose Johnson was careless and was lazy, but she had been brought up by white folks and she needed decent comfort. Her white training had only made for habits, not for nature. Rose had the simple, promiscuous immorality of the black people.

Rose Johnson and Melanctha Herbert like many of the twos with women were a curious pair to be such friends.

Melanctha Herbert was a graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive negress. She had not been raised like Rose by white folks but then she had been half made with real white blood.

She and Rose Johnson were both of the better sort of negroes, there, in Bridgepoint.

"No, I ain't no common nigger," said Rose Johnson, "for I was raised by white folks, and Melanctha she is so bright and learned so much in school, she ain't no common nigger either, though she ain't got no husband to be married to like I am to Sam Johnson."

Why did the subtle, intelligent, attractive, half white girl Melanctha Herbert love and do for and demean herself in service to this coarse, decent, sullen, ordinary, black childish Rose, and why was this unmoral, promiscuous, shiftless Rose married, and that's not so common either, to a good man of the negroes, while Melanctha with her white blood and attraction and her desire for a right position had not yet been really married.

Sometimes the thought of how all her world was made, filled the complex, desiring Melanctha with despair.



She wondered, often, how she could go on living when she was so blue.

Melanctha told Rose one day how a woman whom she knew had killed herself because she was so blue.

Melanctha said, sometimes, she thought this was the best thing for her herself to do.

Rose Johnson did not see it the least bit that way. "I don't see Melanctha why you should talk like you would kill yourself just because you're blue. I'd never kill myself Melanctha just 'cause I was blue. I'd maybe kill somebody else Melanctha 'cause I was blue, but I'd never kill myself. If I ever killed myself Melanctha it'd be by accident, and if I ever killed myself by accident Melanctha, I'd be awful sorry."

Rose Johnson and Melanctha Herbert had first met, one night, at church. Rose Johnson did not care much for religion. She had not enough emotion to be really roused by a revival. Melanctha Herbert had not come yet to know how to use religion. She was still too complex with desire. However, the two of them in negro fashion went very often to the negro church, along with all their friends, and they slowly came to know each other very well.

Rose Johnson had been raised not as a servant but quite like their own child by white folks. Her mother who had died when Rose was still a baby, had been a trusted servant in the family. Rose was a cute, attractive, good looking little black girl and these people had no children of their own and so they kept Rose in their house.

As Rose grew older she drifted from her white folks back to the colored people, and she gradually no longer lived in the old house. Then it happened that these people went away to some other town to live, and somehow Rose stayed behind in Bridgepoint. Her white folks left a little money to take care of Rose, and this money she got every little while.

Rose now in the easy fashion of the poor lived with one woman in her house, and then for no reason went and lived with some other woman in her house. All this

time, too, Rose kept company, and was engaged, first to this colored man and then to that, and always she made sure she was engaged, for Rose had strong the sense of proper conduct.

"No, I ain't no common nigger just to go around with any man, nor you Melanctha shouldn't neither," she said one day when she was telling the complex and less sure Melanctha what was the right way for her to do.

"No Melanctha, I ain't no common nigger to do so, for I was raised by white folks. You know very well Melanctha that I'se always been engaged to them."

And so Rose lived on, always comfortable and rather decent and very lazy and very well content.

After she had lived some time this way, Rose thought it would be nice and very good in her position to get regularly really married. She had lately met Sam Johnson somewhere, and she liked him and she knew he was a good man, and then he had a place where he worked every day and got good wages. Sam Johnson liked Rose very well and he was quite ready to be married. One day they had a grand real wedding and were married. Then with Melanctha Herbert's help to do the sewing and the nicer work, they furnished comfortably a little red brick house. Sam then went back to his work as deck hand on a coasting steamer, and Rose stayed home in her house and sat and bragged to all her friends how nice it was to be married really to a husband.

Life went on very smoothly with them all the year.

Rose was lazy but not dirty and Sam was careful but not fussy, and then there was Melanctha to come in every day and help to keep things neat.

When Rose's baby was coming to be born, Rose came to stay in the house where Melanctha Herbert lived just then, with a big good natured colored woman who did washing.

Rose went there to stay, so that she might have the doctor from the hospital near by to help her have the baby, and then, too, Melanctha could attend to her while she was sick.



Here the baby was born, and here it died, and then Rose went back to her house again with Sam.

Melanctha Herbert had not made her life all simple like Rose Johnson. Melanctha had not found it easy with herself to make her wants and what she had, agree. Melanctha Herbert was always losing what she had in wanting all the things she saw. Melanctha was always being left when she was not leaving others.

Melanctha Herbert always loved too hard and much too often. She was always full with mystery and subtle movements and denials and vague distrusts and complicated disillusion. Then Melanctha would be sudden and impulsive and unbounded in some faith, and then she would suffer and be strong in her repression.

Melanctha Herbert was always seeking rest and quiet, and always she could only find new ways to be in trouble.

Melanctha wondered often how it was she did not kill herself when she was so blue. Often she thought this would be really the best way for her to do.

Melanctha Herbert had been raised to be religious, by her mother. Melanctha had not liked her mother very well. This mother, 'Mis' Herbert, as her neighbors called her, had been a sweet appearing and dignified and pleasant, pale yellow, colored woman. 'Mis' Herbert had always been a little wandering and mysterious and uncertain in her ways.

Melanctha was pale yellow and mysterious and a little pleasant like her mother, but the real power in Melanctha's nature came through her robust and unpleasant and very unendurable black father. Melanctha's father only used to come to where Melanctha and her mother lived, once in a while. It was many years now that Melanctha had not heard or seen or known of anything her father did.

Melanctha Herbert almost always hated her black father, but she loved very well the power in herself that came through him. And so her feeling was really closer to her black coarse father, than her feeling had ever been toward her pale yellow, sweet-appearing mother.

The things she had in her of her mother never made

her feel respect.

Melanctha Herbert had not loved herself in childhood.

All of her youth was bitter to remember. Melanctha had not loved her father and her mother and they had found it very troublesome to have her.

Melanctha's mother and her father had been regularly married. Melanctha's father was a big black virile negro.

He only came once in a while to where Melanctha and her mother lived, but always that pleasant, sweetappearing, pale yellow woman, mysterious and uncertain and wandering in her ways, was close in sympathy and thinking to her big black virile husband. James Herbert was a common, decent enough, colored workman, brutal and rough to his one daughter, but then she was a most disturbing child to manage.

The young Melanctha did not love her father and her mother, and she had a break neck courage, and a tongue that could be very nasty. Then, too, Melanctha went to school and was very quick in all the learning, and she knew very well how to use this knowledge to annoy her parents who knew nothing. Melanctha Herbert had always had a break neck courage. Melanctha always loved to be with horses; she loved to do wild things, to ride the horses and to break and tame them.

Melanctha, when she was a little girl, had had a good chance to live with horses. Near where Melanctha and her mother lived was the stable of the Bishops, a rich family who always had fine horses.

John, the Bishops' coachman, liked Melanctha very well and he always let her do anything she wanted with the horses. John was a decent, vigorous mulatto with a prosperous house and wife and children. Melanctha Herbert was older than any of his children. She was now a well grown girl of twelve and just beginning as a woman.

James Herbert, Melanctha's father, knew this John, the Bishops' coachman very well.

One day James Herbert came to where his wife and



daughter lived, and he was furious.

“Where’s that Melanctha girl of yours,” he said fiercely, “if she is to the Bishops’ stables again, with that man John, I swear I kill her. Why don’t you see to that girl better you, you’re her mother.”

James Herbert was a powerful, loose built, hard handed, black, angry negro. Herbert never was a joyous negro. Even when he drank with other men, and he did that very, often, he was never really joyous. In the days when he had been most young and free and open, he had never had the wide abandoned laughter that gives the broad glow to negro sunshine.

His daughter, Melanctha Herbert, later always made a hard forced laughter. She was only strong and sweet and in her nature when she was really deep in trouble, when she was fighting so with all she really had, that she did not use her laughter. This was always true of poor Melanctha who was always so certain that she hated trouble. Melanctha Herbert was always seeking peace and quiet, and she could always only find new ways to get excited.

James Herbert was often a very angry negro. He was fierce and serious, and he was very certain that he often had good reason to be angry with Melanctha, who knew so well how to be nasty, and to use her learning with a father who knew nothing.

James Herbert often drank with John, the Bishops’ coachman. John in his good nature sometimes tried to soften Herbert’s feeling toward Melanctha. Not that Melanctha ever complained to John of her home life or her father. It was never Melanctha’s way, even in the midst of her worst trouble to complain to any one of what happened to her, but nevertheless somehow every one who knew Melanctha always knew how much she suffered. It was only while one really loved Melanctha that one understood how to forgive her, that she never once complained nor looked unhappy, and was always handsome and in spirits, and yet one always knew how much she suffered.

The father, James Herbert, never told his troubles

either, and he was so fierce and serious that no one ever thought of asking.

‘Mis’ Herbert as her neighbors called her was never heard even to speak of her husband or her daughter. She was always pleasant, sweet-appearing, mysterious and uncertain, and a little wandering in her ways.

The Herberts were a silent family with their troubles, but somehow every one who knew them always knew everything that happened.

The morning of one day when in the evening Herbert and the coachman John were to meet to drink together, Melanctha had to come to the stable joyous and in the very best of humors. Her good friend John on this morning felt very firmly how good and sweet she was and how very much she suffered.

John was a very decent colored coachman. When he thought about Melanctha it was as if she were the eldest of his children. Really he felt very strongly the power in her of a woman. John’s wife always liked Melanctha and she always did all she could to make things pleasant. And Melanctha all her life loved and respected kind and good and considerate people.

Melanctha always loved and wanted peace and gentleness and goodness and all her life for herself poor Melanctha could only find new ways to be in trouble.

This evening after John and Herbert had drunk awhile together, the good John began to tell the father what a fine girl he had for a daughter. Perhaps the good John had been drinking a good deal of liquor, perhaps there was a gleam of something softer than the feeling of a friendly elder in the way John then spoke of Melanctha. There had been a good deal of drinking and John certainly that very morning had felt strongly Melanctha’s power as a woman. James Herbert was always a fierce, suspicious, serious negro, and drinking never made him feel more open. He looked very black and evil as he sat and listened while John grew more and more admiring as he talked half to himself, half to the father, of the virtues and the sweetness of Melanctha.



Suddenly between them there came a moment filled full with strong black curses, and then sharp razors flashed in the black hands, that held them flung backward in the negro fashion, and then for some minutes there was fierce slashing.

John was a decent, pleasant, good natured, light brown negro, but he knew how to use a razor to do bloody slashing.

When the two men were pulled apart by the other negroes who were in the room drinking, John had not been much wounded but James Herbert had gotten one good strong cut that went from his right shoulder down across the front of his whole body. Razor fighting does not wound very deeply, but it makes a cut that looks most nasty, for it is so very bloody. Herbert was held by the other negroes until he was cleaned and plastered, and then he was put to bed to sleep off his drink and fighting.

The next day he came to where his wife and daughter lived and he was furious.

“Where’s that Melanctha, of yours?” he said to his wife, when he saw her. “If she is to the Bishops’ stables now with that yellow John, I swear I kill her. A nice way she is going for a decent daughter. Why don’t you see to that girl better you, ain’t you her mother!”

Melanctha Herbert had always been old in all her ways and she knew very early how to use her power as a woman, and yet Melanctha with all her inborn intense wisdom was really very ignorant of evil. Melanctha had not yet come to understand what they meant, the things she so often heard around her, and which were just beginning to stir strongly in her.

Now when her father began fiercely to assail her, she did not really know what it was that he was so furious to force from her. In every way that he could think of in his anger, he tried to make her say a thing she did not really know. She held out and never answered anything he asked her, for Melanctha had a breakneck courage and she just then badly hated her black father.

When the excitement was all over, Melanctha began

to know her power, the power she had so often felt stirring within her and which she now knew she could use to make her stronger.

James Herbert did not win this fight with his daughter. After awhile he forgot it as he soon forgot John and the cut of his sharp razor. Melanctha almost forgot to hate her father, in her strong interest in the power she now knew she had within her.

Melanctha did not care much now, any longer, to see John or his wife or even the fine horses. This life was too quiet and accustomed and no longer stirred her to any interest or excitement.

Melanctha now really was beginning as a woman. She was ready, and she began to search in the streets and in dark corners to discover men and to learn their natures and their various ways of working.

In these next years Melanctha learned many ways that lead to wisdom. She learned the ways, and dimly in the distance she saw wisdom. These years of learning led very straight to trouble for Melanctha, though in these years Melanctha never did or meant anything that was really wrong.

Girls who are brought up with care and watching can always find moments to escape into the world, where they may learn the ways that lead to wisdom. For a girl raised like Melanctha Herbert, such escape was always very simple. Often she was alone, sometimes she was with a fellow seeker, and she strayed and stood, sometimes by railroad yards, sometimes on the docks or around new buildings where many men were working. Then when the darkness covered everything all over, she would begin to learn to know this man or that. She would advance, they would respond, and then she would withdraw a little, dimly, and always she did not know what it was that really held her. Sometimes she would almost go over, and then the strength in her of not really knowing, would stop the average man in his endeavor. It was a strange experience of ignorance and power and desire. Melanctha did not know what it was that she so badly wanted. She was afraid, and yet she did



not understand that here she really was a coward. Boys had never meant much to Melanctha. They had always been too young to content her. Melanctha had a strong respect for any kind of successful power. It was this that always kept Melanctha nearer, in her feeling toward her virile and unendurable black father, than she ever was in her feeling for her pale yellow, sweetappearing mother. The things she had in her of her mother, never made her feel respect. In these young days, it was only men that for Melanctha held anything there was of knowledge and power. It was not from men however that Melanctha learned to really understand this power.

From the time that Melanctha was twelve until she was sixteen she wandered, always seeking but never more than very dimly seeing wisdom. All this time Melanctha went on with her school learning; she went to school rather longer than do most of the colored children. Melanctha's wanderings after wisdom she always had to do in secret and by snatches, for her mother was then still living and 'Mis' Herbert always did some watching, and Melanctha with all her hard courage dreaded that there should be much telling to her father, who came now quite often to where Melanctha lived with her mother.

In these days Melanctha talked and stood and walked with many kinds of men, but she did not learn to know any of them very deeply. They all supposed her to have world knowledge and experience. They, believing that she knew all, told her nothing, and thinking that she was deciding with them, asked for nothing, and so though Melanctha wandered widely, she was really very safe with all the wandering.

It was a very wonderful experience this safety of Melanctha in these days of her attempted learning. Melanctha herself did not feel the wonder, she only knew that for her it all had no real value.

Melanctha all her life was very keen in her sense for real experience. She knew she was not getting what she so badly wanted, but with all her break neck courage Melanctha here was a coward, and so she could not learn to really understand.

Melanctha liked to wander, and to stand by the railroad yard, and watch the men and the engines and the switches and everything that was busy there, working. Railroad yards are a ceaseless fascination. They satisfy every kind of nature. For the lazy man whose blood flows very slowly, it is a steady soothing world of motion which supplies him with the sense of a strong moving power. He need not work and yet he has it very deeply; he has it even better than the man who works in it or owns it. Then for natures that like to feel emotion without the trouble of having any suffering, it is very nice to get the swelling in the throat, and the fullness, and the heart beats, and all the flutter of excitement that comes as one watches the people come and go, and hears the engine pound and give a long drawn whistle. For a child watching through a hole in the fence above the yard, it is a wonder world of mystery and movement. The child loves all the noise, and then it loves the silence of the wind that comes before the full rush of the pounding train, that bursts out from the tunnel where it lost itself and all its noise in darkness, and the child loves all the smoke, that sometimes comes in rings, and always puffs with fire and blue color.

For Melanctha the yard was full of the excitement of many men, and perhaps a free and whirling future.

Melanctha came here very often and watched the men and all the things that were so busy working. The men always had time for, "Hullo sis, do you want to sit on my engine," and, "Hullo, that's a pretty lookin' yaller girl, do you want to come and see him cookin'." All the colored porters liked Melanctha. They often told her exciting things that had happened; how in the West they went through big tunnels where there was no air to breathe, and then out and winding around edges of great canyons on thin high spindling trestles, and sometimes cars, and sometimes whole trains fell from the narrow bridges, and always up from the dark places death and all kinds of queer devils looked up and laughed in their faces. And then they would tell how sometimes when the train went pounding down steep slippery mountains, great rocks would racket and roll down around them, and sometimes would smash in the car and kill men; and as



the porters told these stories their round, black, shining faces would grow solemn, and their color would go grey beneath the greasy black, and their eyes would roll white in the fear and wonder of the things they could scare themselves by telling.

There was one, big, serious, melancholy, light brown porter who often told Melanctha stories, for he liked the way she had of listening with intelligence and sympathetic feeling, when he told how the white men in the far South tried to kill him because he made one of them who was drunk and called him a damned nigger, and who refused to pay money for his chair to a nigger, get off the train between stations. And then this porter had to give up going to that part of the Southern country, for all the white men swore that if he ever came there again they would surely kill him.

Melanctha liked this serious, melancholy light brown negro very well, and all her life Melanctha wanted and respected gentleness and goodness, and this man always gave her good advice and serious kindness, and Melanctha felt such things very deeply, but she could never let them help her or affect her to change the ways that always made her keep herself in trouble.

Melanctha spent many of the last hours of the daylight with the porters and with other men who worked hard, but when darkness came it was always different. Then Melanctha would find herself with the, for her, gentlemanly classes. A clerk, or a young express agent would begin to know her, and they would stand, or perhaps, walk a little while together.

Melanctha always made herself escape but often it was with an effort. She did not know what it was that she so badly wanted, but with all her courage Melanctha here was a coward, and so she could not learn to understand.

Melanctha and some man would stand in the evening and would talk together. Sometimes Melanctha would be with another girl and then it was much easier to stay or to escape, for then they could make way for themselves together, and by throwing words and laughter to each other, could keep a man from getting too strong in his

attention.

But when Melanctha was alone, and she was so, very often, she would sometimes come very near to making a long step on the road that leads to wisdom. Some man would learn a good deal about her in the talk, never altogether truly, for Melanctha all her life did not know how to tell a story wholly. She always, and yet not with intention, managed to leave out big pieces which make a story very different, for when it came to what had happened and what she had said and what it was that she had really done, Melanctha never could remember right. The man would sometimes come a little nearer, would detain her, would hold her arm or make his jokes a little clearer, and then Melanctha would always make herself escape. The man thinking that she really had world wisdom would not make his meaning clear, and believing that she was deciding with him he never went so fast that he could stop her when at last she made herself escape.

And so Melanctha wandered on the edge of wisdom.

“Say, Sis, why don’t you when you come here stay a little longer?” they would all ask her, and they would hold her for an answer, and she would laugh, and sometimes she did stay longer, but always just in time she made herself escape.

Melanctha Herbert wanted very much to know and yet she feared the knowledge. As she grew older she often stayed a good deal longer, and sometimes it was almost a balanced struggle, but she always made herself escape.

Next to the railroad yard it was the shipping docks that Melanctha loved best when she wandered. Often she was alone, sometimes she was with some better kind of black girl, and she would stand a long time and watch the men working at unloading, and see the steamers do their coaling, and she would listen with full feeling to the yowling of the free swinging negroes, as they ran, with their powerful loose jointed bodies and their childish savage yelling, pushing, carrying, pulling great loads

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Stepping in the Wilderness

§

L.P. Currier

The sound drew us to the doorway. We peered through the screen door and watched the 1971 black Camaro power its way into our driveway. An ancient turquoise travel trailer bounced along behind trying hard to keep up. Rottweiler, Dalmatian, and Brittany all sprung from the open doors and barked in unison, celebrating their newfound freedom. Following their exuberant entrance into our world, the Camaro's human inhabitants made a slower appearance, stretching joint and muscle as they stood after their 3,800-mile journey. I knew I was legally a stepmother, but the reality of my status had just stepped into our quiet Alaskan wilderness for the first time.

I knew about stepmothers. From the vantage point of my mother's knee, I spent many hours of my childhood learning of their malevolence and treachery. I learned how one stepmother sent Hansel and Gretel off into the evil wilderness where witches fatten young children before tossing them in the oven for dinner. I learned of stepmothers who tried to poison and cut the heads off their husband's progeny. I learned of stepmothers who disinherited their stepchildren in order to steal from them. These tales inspired no childhood dreams of becoming a stepmother. With my young woman's bravado, I also carried no dreams of becoming anyone's wife. I was determined that

my heart should always remain free from the legalities of ownership clauses. Instead, my heart decided my fate for me and I married a man with three grown daughters. I was now both wife and stepmother.

Amy was my oldest stepdaughter. She was the rebel child of my husband and his first wife. She was whirlwind and firestorm. She was survivor. While all three daughters suffered the collateral damage of children locked in the space of love decomposing, she seemed the most resilient. Knowing her mother consistently referred to me as "Bruce's little harlot," I expected suspicion or disdain upon our meeting. I wondered if she knew about Snow White eating a poison apple courtesy of her stepmother. Like the stepmother in Six Swans, I saw myself led to the scaffold and tied to a stake to be "burnt to ashes." Instead, she walked up to me and surrounded me with her arms.

"I'm so glad Dad found you," she said.

I climbed down from the scaffold for a while.

Trying to remember my mother's advice that mother-in-laws ought to consider it a classified state secret that they possess opinions on house-keeping, childrearing, or spousal relationships, I thought it wise to apply this to becoming a stepmother as well. I smiled at the laughter



that arrived in our home with our increased population, and cringed each time I cleaned dog pee from our carpet.

We were different species, Amy and I. She had short blond hair and blue eyes. I had thigh-length brunette hair and brown eyes. I was the quiet observer in a room of strangers. She was the observed in a room, and knew no strangers. She was years wiser than I in many respects, despite my twelve-year head start. She ran away from her mother's home at sixteen leaving neither of her parents knowledge of her continued existence or location.

Hints from her sisters of violent boyfriends and secret drug deals gave us knowledge of unspoken pain. My adversaries growing up were far less daunting. Would there be enough snow to fill the reservoirs with water to grow crops in our fields when summer came? Would the cattle price be high enough for my parents to make the ranch payment each year?

Still, she and I seemed to find common ground. I felt no desire to sneak in to her bedroom and cut off her head while she slept as the wicked stepmother in Roland schemed to do. She voiced no desire to wander forth into the wilderness to escape my presence as the hapless children did in Grimm's *The Little Brother and Sister*. We could write our own stories. I handed her the rag and carpet cleaner and she sideways grinned at me as she took it and started cleaning up dog pee.

Amy's two younger sisters soon followed her, finding their own paths into our northern

wilderness. I searched for my footing with each of them. They came and went through different moments of our lives, rediscovering their father and learning to accept me as part of that package. We learned to love. Amy stayed. I held her 15-month-old son, Ryan while she married her Camaro boyfriend who was his father. I held her son while she started her own business, fought with her new husband, and laughed and cried her way through life.

Adding to that life, one day she came bouncing down the stairs into my basement with an announcement, "I'm pregnant again."

I imagined the wicked queen gazing into the magic mirror,

Oh mirror, mirror, on the wall,

Who is the most pregnant one of all?

"UMMM, Me too," I said, unsure of what to expect.

My friend, my stepdaughter, jumped down over the final three stairs laughing as she helped me back down from the stepmother's scaffold. She gained both a little brother and a son in February of the next year. We held our new sons together, taking turns rocking them. We watched them start kindergarten together; their classmates incredulous when one called me Grandma, and the other, Mom. My son referred to her sons as, "The Nephews," and to Amy as, "the other mother." Our boys grew close as brothers. I watched her marriage slowly descend into the legacy where hurt begets hurt. She sent her husband to live in a rented room.



I held her boys as they cried the same tears she once cried. When we are young, we have no shame in our nakedness. On the first morning of our sorrow, Amy walked down our stairs like Eve before the serpent bade her eat from the tree of knowledge. The firelight from our wood stove played across her pale bare skin. She stared into nothingness like a wandering Zombie in a black and white horror movie. Her young sons stood confused and afraid of her naked emptiness.

“Mommy, what’s wrong?” her six-year-old asked.

There was no answer. She silently walked into the bathroom and sat on the toilet without closing the door, seemingly unaware of our presence or any learned societal rules of privacy.

“Amy, what’s wrong?” her sister asked as she leaned down to look into her face while shaking her shoulders.

She slowly seemed to focus on her sister’s face, and said, “I don’t know.”

The 911 operator asked what was wrong. My husband said, “I don’t know.” Our neighbor, who drove the ambulance, said her blood sugar was so low, he didn’t know how she could walk, naked or not. We asked him why. He said, “I don’t know.” The doctors prodded, analyzed, and X-rayed and said, “We don’t know.” They filled her with dye and the MRI orchestra of beeps, horns, and sci-fi blips filled the room with industrial percussion. Needles

sucked blood and samples from her body and couriers carried them off to men and women in white coats. Seattle doctors advised Alaskan doctors. They said, “We know.” No stepmother could devise a crueler poison. They called it adrenocortical carcinoma. It was a poison so rare, when we asked the physicians how they treat it, they said, “We don’t know.”

They began cutting the poison from her body. In the beginning, a seven-pound tumor told her why she could not lose weight around her middle but could everywhere else. She lost weight. Next, it was half her lung and a kidney. During one of these medieval torture rituals, they thought they saw spots on her liver.

I Googled for Stage IV adrenocortical carcinoma. I’ve long reveled in the power of information revealed by the magic of keyboard and electronic screen in our new world of bits and bytes. I was under the distinct impression that enough information could solve any problem. The National Cancer Society gave me the mundane facts of the two tiny triangles that rest atop our kidneys. They don’t beat like our heart or breathe like our lungs declaring their importance in our continued existence. They are the silent backroom workers that make us male and female, control our blood pressure, and tell our bodies how to use the protein, fat, and carbohydrates we feed it. There was comfort in facts. I now knew why we had adrenal glands.

I clicked on the symptoms links. The new list of facts was no longer as comforting. It told me



of women that grew beards and men that grew breasts as the disease stole their dignity long before their breath. It told me of round, red, full “moonlike” faces. I remembered the way Amy’s nose turned a bright red for no apparent reason and seemed swollen and round. I read of tumors that produce hormones that trick the body into thinking it is making excess insulin, which causes blood sugar to plummet. Amy now had to wear a backpack that constantly injected glucose into her veins to counteract the onslaught of fake insulin.

I Googled survival rates of Stage IV patients. I raced through screens searching for one that had the information I wanted to read. I wanted desperately to find how survivors became survivors. I found no survivors. I found mortality statistics. I read, “Overall prognosis is poor.” I read, “An average survival of nine months for Stage IV patients.” I read about “palliative” care as being the preferred course of treatment. Palliative care sounded all too close to kissing a child’s booboo to make them feel better. I tried Dogpile and Yahoo. Their facts were no more comforting. I showed my husband the things I knew, and we wept with our newfound knowledge.

Amy invited her husband back home. I saw no love in her eyes when she looked at him. I wondered why she wanted him back. I thought about life being too short to live with someone you no longer love. Especially her life.

Her mother and stepfather flew north to take care of Amy and will her back to health.

I stepped back into my rightful step position, and my husband and I watched from the sidelines. Amy’s new stepfather and I walked the perimeter of the past when we all joined in the same room or dinner table. There were too many ghosts to count. Her mother had joined a charismatic church and seemed to believe the louder she shouted when praying, the better God must hear. She shouted, cried in tongues, and laid hands on her daughter claiming faith would surely make her whole. Google stole my faith so I cooked meals for the wife-in-law and all my marriage acquired relatives who sought to change the unchangeable. My husband wept for his child and her pain. I wept for my stepdaughter and for all of us who loved her. I wished Google did not exist.

My husband called me when I was at work in the Kuparuk oilfield for my two-week shift, 800 miles north. He said I should come home, that the end was near. The cancer was destroying her liver and there were no more parts to cut out of her. I flew home and watched her in her hospital bed as her mother and Amy’s husband hovered over death, but still denied its existence. Once when I was alone with her, she held my hand and said with a slight grin, “You know, he’s driving me nuts.”

I disobeyed my mother’s mother-in-law advice and said,

“You know, he doesn’t have to be here. Your choice.”

“Yes I know. But, I made him promise,” she said.



“Promise what?”

There was no answer. Her eyes closed and she drifted back into the fog. I waited for the delayed answers we had come to expect. The toxins entering her brain from her non-functioning liver were slowly taking their toll. An answer might come ten minutes after a question. There were no answers this time.

Promises forever hidden.

We gathered around her still-breathing shell. Her mother and Amy’s husband sat at each side of her, willing her to live and speak forgiveness just one more time. Her younger sister stood by my side, her arm locked in mine. My husband sat folded into himself. I silently counted one-chickadee, two-chickadee, and three-chickadee between gasps of air. As the chickadees grew longer, the realization seemed to finally occur to her husband and mother that mortality statistics were going to win this round. There were no magical healing oils or tongues of fire from heaven that could change what Google already knew. She breathed into silence at last. It was April 1. It was also Easter Sunday. I didn’t know which symbol to grasp.

I watched Amy’s mother try to find her way through arrangements. She asked me to write Amy’s obituary saying, “You knew her better as an adult than I did.” I watched a mother’s sorrow and imagined what it would mean to lose my own son. There were still differences between mothers and stepmothers. My heart was breaking, but as a friend instead of a mother. I no longer heard the profane words she spoke

about me to her daughters as an extension of her bitterness towards her once upon a time husband. I now only heard a mother’s heart weeping for her child and all that might have been.

Somewhere in the sadness of days, Amy’s youngest son asked me, “I know Mama can’t come back to live with us, but do you suppose she might come down from heaven just for a visit?”

I told him she does come to visit. She visits when her oldest son gently cares for all creatures great and small. I see him playing with our dogs and cats and feel her presence. She visits when her youngest son seethes with anger searching for justice. She visits when I walk her dog past the road where she lived, and he still tries to turn there, tugging at his leash.

Amy’s husband married again and gave his children a new stepmother. The trail of marriages behind her, four children, and a new baby fathered by Amy’s husband made us wonder where he was hiding any wisdom he might have gained over his thirty-four years of life. I watched his wife’s body draw men’s eyes to her as she waltzed into a room. I watched her move with the power of this knowledge and understood that wisdom was not part of this equation. I pictured her talking to mirrors. I listened to our grandsons describe their new existence, and thought of the stepmother in *The Juniper Tree*.

*And the evil one filled her mind with this
till she was quite wroth with the little boy*



and she pushed him from one corner to the other and slapped him here and cuffed him there, until the poor child was in continual terror, for when he came out of school he had no peace in any place.

Our youngest grandson told us of stepsiblings who thought it hilarious to pretend benevolence towards him and make him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He bit into it, only to find a fresh dog turd hidden in the middle. His stepmother laughed and said, “Now that wasn’t very nice.” Their father sat transfixed on the television. They told us how their stepmother shouts at their father that she wishes he didn’t have them, as “they are just two extra mouths to feed.” I Googled for legal definitions of child abuse. I found no mention of dog turds.

The boys now arrive at our doorstep the first day of summer, and leave on the last. The winter days are bleaker. I sometimes imagine

a scaffold as we bake and package cookies to send home with them and hide in their room in the small lock boxes we purchased for them.

One day, the boys arrived telling us that their stepmother thought they should all move to Arkansas to live closer to her relatives. I Googled for grandparent’s rights. There are none. I asked their father if they were moving to Arkansas. He said, “Carol wants to. But I promised Amy you know.”

“Promised her what?”

“That as long as the boys were young, I would live next to you and her dad and let you two help raise them.” I wondered about sacrifices and promises Hansel and Gretel’s mother might have whispered before she died. I bake them more cookies hoping a trail of crumbs will always lead them here through the wilderness. ¶



The Ghost of the Wisest Child



As part of a larger study of the collective writings of J.D. Salinger and Jack Kerouac, “The Ghost of the Wisest Child” considers the role of memory throughout Salinger’s and Kerouac’s works, especially the memory of Seymour Glass and its influence on his brother Buddy. Like the torment memory recreates for Swann in Proust’s Swann’s Way, the narrators of Kerouac and Salinger each treat their memories as new experiences through which their brothers are resurrected. While both authors use children to critique the institutionalization of knowledge, this essay discusses the individual’s need for society.

Analyzing J.D. Salinger’s style, John O. Lyons notes, “The rising note of dissent that can be heard in the criticism of Salinger’s recent works is usually based on the critic’s discomfort at a writer who mysteriously yet conspicuously places himself in the middle of his fictions” (62). We have already seen, with Kerouac’s *The Subterraneans*, the problems that arise by mistaking art for autobiography; much like those trying to identify Shakespeare’s Dark Lady, these critics of Salinger and Kerouac are missing a more rewarding puzzle by ignoring the works’ artistic intent.

Like Panish’s article on Kerouac, Lyons, in his article “The Romantic Style of Salinger’s ‘Seymour: An Introduction,’” places J.D. Salinger in the Romantic tradition. Unlike Panish, Lyons is perceptive of Salinger’s intentions when adopting a Romantic-like style:

The quality of “Seymour” (and other recent tales in the Glass saga) which most disturbs Salinger’s commentators in the constant

presence of Buddy Glass, the candid, posturing, erratic, jesting, pretentious narrator. ... Not only is the teller of the story more interesting than the story told, but he is closely identified with the author, and the reader is frequently reminded of the process of writing as though he were looking over the shoulder of the writer as he worked, as though neither knows what is going to happen. (64)

In the style of “Seymour: An Introduction,” Buddy the narrator draws attention to the process of writing when he introduces his intentions for new paragraphs and quips at his parenthetical comments by presenting us with a bouquet of parenthesis. The design, Lyons tells us, is to achieve a response to Buddy as narrator in addition to the response to the narrative.

When Seymour coaches Buddy at marble to not aim so much, we respond to a child with Zen intuition as we presumably would were it presented in any form. Like Seymour reading Oriental poetry, we do not need



policing. But, we also respond to Buddy, thirty-two years later, still struggling to explain Seymour's coaching:

What Seymour called over to me—or, rather, coached over to me—that evening at curb marbles in 1927 seems to me contributive and important in my eyes at this interval than the fact of Seymour's flatulent brother, aged forty, at long last being presented with a Davega bicycle of his own to give away, preferably to the first asker. ... When he was coaching me, from the curbstone across the street, to quit aiming my marble at Ira Yankauer's—and he was ten, please remember—I believe he was instinctively getting at something very close in spirit to the sort of instructions a master archer in Japan will give when he forbids a willful new student to aim his arrows at the target. (206–207)

With the benefit of Time, Buddy still struggles to explain Seymour's intuition, suggesting an analogy, qualifying the analogy, then abandoning it for another analogy before finally reverting to an image of Seymour himself playing marbles, which he lets stand as the most satisfying illustration of Seymour's lesson in the absence of a good explanation.

When Buddy discusses the impact of controlled language in Oriental poetry (and Seymour's eventual adaptation of this form), he is expositing on his own potential influence as a narrator on the reader. Seymour controls language so vividly that Buddy comfortably reconstructs a detailed scene from thirty-four syllables. With control of language the successful narrator paints a vivid picture and composes a song:

Each of [Seymour's] poems is as unsonorous, as quiet, as he believed a poem should be, but there are intermittent short blasts of euphony (for want of a less atrocious word for it), which have the effect on me personally of someone—surely no one completely sober—opening my door, blowing three or four or five unquestionably sweet and expert notes on a

cornet into the room, then disappearing. (128)

Just as Buddy would not expect himself to play curb marbles with Seymour's same transcendence, or recreate Seymour's stoopball technique, he would not presume to accomplish Seymour's jazz-like mastery within the limitations of a double haiku. However, he can succeed as a narrator by following Seymour's advice: "Ask yourself, as a reader, what piece of writing in all the world Buddy Glass would most want to read if he had his heart's choice" (161). Or, he should follow his instincts rather than aim at the audience's preferences.

Buddy's description of Seymour's poetry should look familiar to fans of Kerouac. It echoes Kerouac's ambition of style as influenced by music:

Jazz and bop, in the sense of a, say, a tenor man drawing a breath and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement's been made. ... That's how I therefore separate my sentences, as breath separations of the mind. (*Art* 83)

When Jack Duluoz tells of his own childhood in *Dr. Sax*, a game similar to Buddy's curb marbles provides a moment of recognition that is both "contributive and important." Young Jack designs a baseball game that he can play alone, in the absence of his own deceased saintly brother (Duluoz reverts to a derivation of this solitaire baseball game while a lonesome fire lookout in *Desolation Angels*):

Heretofore the diamond I'd drawn in the ground and the game I was playing were synonymous with regular distances and power-values in baseball, but suddenly I hit this incredible homerun, ... a sinister end-of-the-world homerun.

I always thought there was something mysterious and shrouded and foreboding about this event which put an end to childish play. (75–76)



One can say that neither even, when read without a narrator's "policing," is meaningful. Seymour suggests that Buddy not aim, possibly, because Seymour is somewhat overbearing with advice and not aiming—a habit of an uncompetitive child—works for him. Jack breaks through the boundaries that he, as a child without a scientific understanding of baseball's governing physics, has imposed. Each narrator assigns the value of their respective memory: Seymour evolves as a prodigiously wise seer who affects nearly every moment of his siblings' lives; the coming-of-age "doom" of Jack's homerun spawns a mythology that aids him in understanding the role of an individual in the adult world. In either instance, the meaning placed on the scene also reveals something personal about the narrator.

Without defining Salinger's style as Romantic, Ihab Hassan, in his article, "Almost the Voice of Silence: The Later Novelettes of J.D. Salinger," makes an argument similar, though more expansive, to that of Lyons:

All three novelettes obviously entertain a sacramental view of life, and a view of language that is increasingly so. ... The risks ["Seymour"] takes with language are far greater [than "Zooney"]. The novella is Salinger's most ambitious confrontation with his theme. In it, the problem of the artist, ravaged by love, is actually dramatized before our eyes. Buddy's atonement is realized at last though his words run wild like the wind. It is quite as if the happiness of art—Buddy's "professional ecstasy"—lay in the freedom of language to seek some purposeless and inclusive antiform.

In a sense, then, silence is not only a theme of these stories but also a principle of their form. What they demonstrate is this: the strange efforts of language to inhibit its own profane impulse *through* wordiness. (18)

Like the narrator of *Madame Bovary*, who presents Emma trapped in a web of language not her own, Buddy recognizes the power of the word to inhibit. With such an understanding, Hassan argues, silence becomes a

theme of the Glass novellas.

Whereas Lyons argues that the style of "Seymour" draws attention to Buddy as an important character—going farther than "Zooney" in drawing the narrator from the periphery—Hassan extends the effect, which he labels "sur-real," to a manipulation of the reality of the Glass world:

It makes use of all resources of language, including accident and distortion, to convey an unmediated vision of reality. Form, as it were, *plays* at denying its own conventions of time and distance, dream and fact, so that we may see *through* it. ... The relation between author, character, and reader are redefined in space as in time; they no longer maintain their habitual distance from one another. The stage, the formal frame of the action, vanishes, and in the cross references between past and present, the history of the Glasses fills one huge moment. Language and reality are refracted in a thousand mirrors—witness the endless chatter, overlapping modes of discourse, dazzling interplay of views—so that language and reality may appear for what they are in Salinger's estimate: something whole, holy, and perhaps as ineffable as silence. (6)

Buddy's marble anecdote, then, demonstrates how his parenthetical writing, "without aiming," produces for Buddy's writing the same discipline Seymour accomplishes with his own double haikus, conveying an "unmediated vision of reality." What Seymour accomplishes by restraining his language, Buddy accomplishes by removing conventional restraints of time and space. In Hassan's view, Salinger accomplishes with Buddy's narrative form something on par with what Vonnegut attempts in *Slaughterhouse Five*:

The Tralfamadorians can look at all of the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that



interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one. (34)

Buddy manages to create the same effect without the artifice of aliens to explain it, but he also struggles to find his memories and needs to focus on his mental image of Seymour as a child to find moments to share with his reader. Not as spontaneous, on the other hand, as Proust's narrator involuntarily resurrecting Combray in the taste of a madeleine, he struggles with a "labour in vain to recapture [our own past]: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile" (Proust 59).

Buddy recognizes his task might be futile:

It it's a true description, I should be able to just give it train fare, and maybe pack a sandwich for it and a little something hot in a thermos, and that's all. The other passengers in the car must move slightly away from it, as though it were a trifle high. Oh, marvellous thought. *Let him come out of this a trifle high.* (165)

Buddy's task is a little disingenuous, as well, because he doesn't want to give us Seymour, but rather something better than Seymour:

Had Seymour no grievous faults, no vices, no meanness, that can be listed, at least in a hurry? What was he, anyway? *A saint?*

Thankfully, it isn't my responsibility to answer that one. (108)

Buddy simultaneously raises Seymour as a Saint while sidestepping the obligation of defending his claim. He may be something short of a saint, but he also sets a high bar for his siblings.

In contrast to his desire for a re-animated and intelligent Seymour, Buddy denounces his earliest attempt to write about an adult Seymour:

In the earlier, much shorter story I did, back in the late forties, he not only appeared in the flesh but walked, talked, went for a dip in the

ocean, and fired a bullet through his brain in the last paragraph. However, several members of my immediate, if somewhat farflung, family, who regularly pick over my published prose for small technical errors, have gently pointed out to me ... that the young man, the "Seymour," who did the walking and talking in that early story, not to mention the shooting, was not Seymour at all but, oddly, someone with a striking resemblance to—alley oop, I'm afraid—myself. (112–113)

In this passage Salinger bestows to his narrator Buddy, to the dissatisfaction of critics (as Lyons notes), a publishing career that parallels his own; though the narrator of "A Perfect Day For Bananafish" never identifies himself (a trait uncharacteristic of Buddy), we can choose to read Buddy as the narrator, just as we can be free to assume Buddy the narrator of at least "Teddy," "Down at the Dinghy," "Uncle Wiggily In Connecticut," and even *The Catcher In The Rye*. Salinger, here, invites us to be distracted by Buddy's claim, to read Holden Caulfield in contrast to Seymour, or to dismiss the Seymour we meet in "Bananafish" as a failing of Buddy's. In doing so, Holden and Seymour would be lost, collapsing into a psychoanalytical criticism of Buddy Glass. Any analysis of the Seymour in "Bananafish" as the same Seymour who advises Buddy to not aim so much becomes questionable. Buddy, on the other hand, would transcend his fictional life by writing something tangible, like Donald Kaufman's writing credit (and Oscar award) for co-writing the film *Adaptation*.

Aside from raising the importance of Buddy as the driving force behind the Glass stories, through whom all criticism must pass, his claim also derails a critical attempt to justify the suicidal Seymour with the Glass family's philosopher-king. We could not support, for instance, James E. Bryan's suspicions of Seymour's sexual guilt. Instead, Buddy boxes us into a corner, where we are expected to submit to his resolution:

In a seer, what part of the human anatomy

continued, page 117



Hell § Jeff Klooger

L'enfer, c'est les autres. (Hell is other people.)

Jean-Paul Sartre

all night
he speaks like a cut-throat
words of violence and contempt
ugly words like fists
spitting them out like broken teeth
how everything is shit
everyone a cunt
and every cunt deserves to feel
the same pain

I hear him talking
outside my window
telling filthy secrets about me
if I could I would stop him
but I am here inside
with just enough room
to wait and to listen
but no room to move
and no way out

when he is away
I hurry past his door
hoping to wash things clean
but the laundry is full of his dirty clothes
all the machines overflow with his personal things
his filthy mud-caked pants and shirts
his sodden socks and underwear
piled into mounds
even the air is thick with him
his defiance

now he is filling the bathtub with golf balls
he pours them in, an avalanche of chaos
they sound like hail on my roof
like stones thrown against my walls
he stirs them like a recipe for sleeplessness
he stirs them and lets the noises bubble inside my head
he is cooking up something deadly
strange, unnatural
he is drowning my peace
he is grinding me between the hard surfaces
he is squeezing the air out
he is pushing me back and back
stealing the space I need
to breathe and to think

he is smiling in the bright light
while I am hunched in darkness
his music explodes from enormous speakers
thundering through me
hammering my ears
but I will not make a noise
I refuse to react
instead I practise the art of contraction
and disappearance
each day I take up less space
move more carefully
breathe more quietly
if I become small enough
he will no longer be able
even to think of me

then I will be free ¶



The Experience of Strangers

§

Jeff Klooger

And the second trouble with poetry—and I'm gonna stop the list at two—is the presence of presumptuousness in poetry, the sense you get in a poem that the poet takes for granted an interest on the reader's part in the poet's autobiographical life, in the poet's memories, problems, difficulties and even minor perceptions. I try to presume that no one is interested in me. And I think experience bears that out. No one's interested in the experiences of a stranger—let's put it that way.

Former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins – from an interview with Joel Whitney

I

Today I read a book about a man
I've never met and don't presume to know. It told
of his experience of war – which war
hardly matters (they're all bloody and cruel
and full of glorious, selfless acts).
A million others had read this book
before me, all entranced by a stranger's perils
and fortunes. This book is not unique. In fact
the bestseller lists are full of books about
the experiences of strangers, all consumed voraciously
by people who, being human, can never learn enough
about their fellows, but hunger for stories
day and night. Surely it was ever thus,
since half-men gathered round a flame
to share tales of the hunt. All of us want to know
each other's business, all the ins and outs,
the comings and goings, the highs and lows.
We want to relive for ourselves those other lives
we can never have, since we can have but one, and one
is almost never enough for a human soul. We want
the tastes and smells of worlds beyond our reach,
the thrills and aches of hearts that are not our own,
but which remind us of ourselves, and teach us anew
what it is to be alive and human.

II

Presumption is a funny thing. Do not presume



your life will interest others – and certainly never assume that others will care to learn of your life simply because it is yours. But equally, never presume a stranger won't wish to know what you have known, to see what you have seen, to sense and touch and grasp the world as you have done. Self-pity is of course a bore, as is self-righteousness or self-aggrandizement; but sparing these, to tell your tales, humble though they be, if truly human and skilfully told – surely this is a fitting task for any writer, if not a duty. Billy Collins, former U.S. Poet Laureate, like all good poets who rail against the personal in poetry, is a hypocrite. I know, for instance, from reading his poems that he has never fished on the Susquehanna in July (though he has seen a painting of a fisherman afloat upon that river), that he once tried to drown the racket of a barking dog with a Beethoven symphony, only to find dog and orchestra merging in a strange, new canine music that still somehow bespoke Beethoven's genius. I know that on a day he woke with barely a thought in his head he ended thinking of the letter *Z* and its place in the world. It's true he gives us more, much more than just the facts – but doesn't any good teller of tales? – and true, too, that he doesn't always speak of himself. But neither does he elide his *I*, as though the universe could enter a poem without some poet bringing it in, seeing what there is to see, and thinking about their world and what it might mean.

III

And don't for a moment imagine poets who refrain from saying *I* and *Me* thereby exceed or escape the limits of their personal history. The poet's memories, problems, difficulties, minor perceptions all find their place in the world of the poem, bidden or unbidden, in autobiographical person or disguised as the purely fictitious or objectively selfless. What I am I can never escape, because I'm all I have and precisely what I need to go beyond myself and encounter the world. I am a mystery, an endless fascination, not just to myself but to all those *I*'s longing just like me



to know themselves and how they fit within their worlds.
If I can shine a little light on my dark places
then others too might find their own way into the light.
It is a hopeful, human thing
to share that quest, to stoke that vision, to step
into the day and introduce yourself
as one among billions, as significant
and insignificant a representative of what it all means
as anyone else, but putting all that into words
that others may not find within themselves,
but want and need and long to find. ¶

A Child My Age

§

Jeff Klooger

Like William Hurt in *Altered States*
or the lead singer of A-Ha
in the video of *Take On Me*
my father staggers down our hall
hurling himself against the walls
again and again
trying to pound the pain out
of his tortured body
— to destroy himself
or release from his prison
the man a child my age
once dreamt of being. ¶



Emperor

§

Kenneth Pobo

Wang Wei says my
Emperor is named Commerce,
says his emperors got nasty,
but usually just wanted sex,
food and a palace—

Commerce wants my soul.

When I give Wang Wei
my VISA card, he takes it back
to ancient China, buries it
at the foot of a mountain,
and asks dirt to help me
by wearing down the numbers
and to free my name
from the plastic grip. ¶

You Can Eat

§

Kenneth Pobo

oyster crackers while
the sun sleeps it off and make
love to the propane fireplace's
wheeze—but you won't stop
the wind
feeling you
leave ¶

Steve Reads *Huck Finn*

§

Kenneth Pobo

Even on weekends he gets up
at 6:00, each day like curtains
that no breeze moves, no
feisty current, just streets

piling up on each other
like gear in an overstuffed
tackle box. His bank job
requires a tie, which requires

a desire to hang from a ceiling
until someone cuts him down.
Huck owned little
but had adventure—

the river could veer this way
or that, strangers could rise
like bubbles, wherever the raft
would land you could end up

eating fried chicken or running
for your life. Instead of a raft,
a mall sucks Steve in
a few blocks away. He walks

and walks, buys nothing,
can't face his home
TV with its seductive demand
to be watched. ¶



Guns and Butter

§

Kenneth Pobo

You get home and the phone rings. Can't
pay your mortgage, have put them off

too many times. In a fetal position,
you hold a pretzel, remember Econ 101,

a required course, taught by a strange woman
who wore sandals with plastic fruit on top--

government majors needed to understand guns
and butter. You flunked. Guns scared you

and butter made you burp. Evicted, you'll
move along. It won't be pretty. ¶

Before Eve

§

M. Rather, Jr.

Others live in the garden,
their tongues are rasped
and grooved, They blow
purple-green smoke.

They lack skin
to which a girdle could stick,
instead scaled flesh,
wet and slick. Their hair
moves without wind, slithers
around earless holes.

Their spit algae-frothed,
Their lips drop water,
and their eyes blink sidewise
I know the crevasses
of their necks, their metal

fingers. When I was young
their pockmarked wings covered
me in night. ¶



They Wait Until Morning

§

M. Rather, Jr.

Your gray eyes, hair brown, the strands falling
down your back. My eyes half-closed, softly
searching. Two like flat stones sparking,
struck by bones My ribs, curling, my soul's
thin vase barely holds your thoughts moving fast
the first time our fingers run down arching spines.
We become slowed like runners who pause
on rough paths. Our teeth not opening, but wanting—
Your bend classic, with the old blanket falling off
the shoulder. Your eyes reflect the red leaf
on the stream's bank. ¶

Lament for the Lost Cat with Motley Paws

§

M. Rather, Jr.

It was 3am and 3 degrees
the last time she was seen.

I looked through our picture window,
the one I replaced instead of buying
a ring. You had finally moved
the furniture around, or maybe
he did while you went to work.
Our picture frames had been taken down.
He parked his car in our driveway.
The trees leafless pillars stood
sentinel framing our door.
No one raked, and I crackled across
the driveway, and the rough cut
side walk, tripped over the rut
I had cut into the front yard with my feet.

There in the picture window
her bright green eyes,
unblinking, speckled with yellow.
Her little fanged jaw opened like she
knew I will return to this place
for her to walk across my shoulder.
And I could not hear her mew.
I left her
rubbing the glass with her neck.

I did not want to wake your new lover or you. ¶



Lulu in Chicago

§

Andrea DeAngelis

I
Lilith

Consumed of worms
on the fleet of foot
devoted to only a minute of prayers
an owl's forgotten call screeches.

This female night beast
bears a disease-ridden wind,
"You are not a woman
unless you bear children for me"
the milk in your breasts thinning.

This is a matchbook of poems
that barely contains
three rooms to breathe
in this city of Chicago.

You must learn only prose
do not concern yourself
with thoughts of love
to disappear again
in an elegant dream.

"Can you spare me some peace?"
Ten more rooms, please
of hate and disgrace.

Once I had gladdened them
then you had enjoyed the stolen light
taking all my midnights.

He had an incubus' means
of detecting and infecting erotic reveries
you could control such a dream
if you really wanted to

but the demon within
comes only as far as Chicago.

Chicago is a city without itself
or at least to such an imaginary transplant
I had forgotten who you were
I had forgotten me
though it wasn't as easy.

I shall disappear
I shall disappear
I shall tear my house down

for what else is there?

But I am not possessed
of any spirit
of any magic
only compulsion and attraction
extortion and deception.

Your night call
could be defined
as a howling.

No one wants to hear about
the loss of motherhood
No one wants to talk to you
once you're over a certain fertile age.

Why did they name me Lilith?
when they knew such names mattered
What were they after?

So I don't dare date men with the letter A
but sometimes they still lie to me
when they lay with me

in fear



and I find they were first
in the alphabet always.

You have some strange expectations in life
when you were always first in line
you think you are deserving
but with a name starting with L,
you are an afterthought
especially a name so maimed
a lisp weighted down,
tugged from stubborn lips
they keep leapfrogging over you.

Well, I prefer Lulu,
the maiden who has seized the moon
lascivious and wanted
not lust-filled and feared
never to be honored.

II Alu

Yes, I have other names too
but I prefer the shorter
the blunt instrument of my intent.

I was not so instructed
to cause harm they say
I do it of my own accord
I am only living down to my name
the name you imposed.

I have a scorpion in-between my legs
it poisons those I lay
I only believe in sex
these new days
for I am born and born again.

Each rebirth creating
gyrating contortions
a tortuous reshape
of flesh and clay
an unstable mixture

of sense and senselessness.

I would have chosen to be a man
when I was in that gray space
(my secret names, my secret wish).

I had been a man once, you know
Roaming the streets
a stray dog in heat
consuming all your dreams
but they weren't meaty things
scraps cling to the bone
sinew gutting.

Men are always more strong
but their dreams are weak
superficial slabs of beef
Let me reshape my extra layer

into hate.

I have strength but
I do not have weakness for this
controlled by my passions
pissing lust.

Why would you name me Lilith
if you did not want it
to come to this?

III Lamia

Every child I have
I shall raise from the dead
but I can't

unless

I steal them from you.

This gift of my eyes,
a wretched obsession
because I can never again close them.

I shall always see my dead children



perhaps this is motherhood,
a wound that always threatens
and when it is open,

open forever.

I shall escape to Chicago to erase
but no place is an escape
unless I can cut these eyes
from my head like Zeus commanded.

I will have strength for this yet.

IV
Shadow of woman
Shadow of man

Yes things change
when a child comes our way
and then change again
when the child goes away.

Our shadows of shadows
do battle

to win

I will batter myself
for I have such bruises
for you like them better worn in.

“Lulu, they only wanted the boys
but you took the girl.
Why?”

Now I am forever away
Lulu in Chicago and despised
I shall die my deaths
for death did not turn out to be
the place to hide.

I fly

from the sins in my wings
but from myself
far enough, I can never be. ¶



Leader of Men

§

Meg Tuite

He was a tall, good-looking man, though his features bore the slight tremor of the frenzied, similar to that strained purposefulness of a dog that has come to the end of its chain, but does not agree. He waved a butcher's knife in front of himself while he spoke, and with each thrust, the knife, a bit of a yes-man itself, nodded up and down in obvious collusion with the man, giving an added force to the man's words that alone they did not carry. She watched the man and the knife equally, but said nothing, though her face, exquisite in its own right, said everything. They stood in front of a wounded tomato that she had brutally mutilated before the man had been able to assess the seriousness of the situation and rush in to salvage it from complete demise. There the tomato sat in front of them, bleeding to death from its right side, a savage testimony to the woman's complete and utter incompetence.

"Wrong," the man said. "Wrong, wrong, wrong!" He snatched the knife quickly, halting this bloodbath. Was it necessary for the man to be everywhere at once? Was there nothing that she wouldn't destroy if left to her own devices? She understood nothing—absolutely useless. The man held the knife forcefully, and with authority, letting it know immediately who was in charge now, and it was to do exactly as told.

"Look," the man said. "Look at the knife.

See how I hold it?" It was true. In his hand the knife was pointed and dangerous. It was a weapon, an extension of himself. Her reddened, shriveled hand had reduced the knife to nothing more than a feeble, clumsy thing that fumbled ridiculously with vegetables, pawing them into a slow and painful death. The blade stuttered and hung foolishly, until it became dull and lifeless like her tongue.

The man looked over at her once more. His eyes rolled together in disgusted formation from one side of his head to the other, a trembling final summation of his entire contempt, and without another moment's hesitation the man gripped the knife like nothing less than a leader of men, and using swift, competent, ruthless strokes, sliced the remaining portion of the tomato that she had not defaced, whereupon the tomato-eighths, also prepared to show her a lesson she would not soon forget, dropped neatly away from each other and lined themselves up efficiently, cleanly, and precisely—like well-trained little soldiers in uniform red. The man gave her one more derisive look and swaggered out of the kitchen. She stared at the tomato, and then after the man.

"This is your head," she said. She slammed the remains of the tomato against the wall and watched them slide artfully, gracefully down to the floor. ¶



Prevailing Winds

§

Meg Tuite

Winds of words howled inside Gerald's head as he sat silently eating his supper listening to his wife.

"I don't understand what you did to make this happen?" She picked at her lima beans, while behind glass a panorama of juniper and blazing mountain ranges surrounded them. Gusts whistled past the house without giving anything away.

"It doesn't make sense," she said.

"No," said Gerald, picking up a potato. "It doesn't".

"What about that McCarthy character? He's never on time and barely does a damn thing. Why not him?" she asked.

"Would've made more sense," he said quietly, while wind chimes clanged outside. The front swing jangled on its chains.

"Somebody had something against you, some kind of grudge. Things like this don't happen for no reason," she said.

He looked up at her, then back at his plate. His teeth ripped away at a chicken leg.

"What about that Carl? He's just been waiting to push you out. His wife's already living like she's the queen. Gets her fingers done at that Nails Unlimited, over by the bank. You don't

see me walking in that place. She's got nerve sashaying in and out of there, like he's already got the job." She poked at the food on her plate. "They could care less if we starved."

Gerald continued to eat.

"What the hell are we going to do now?" she asked. "You know I can't work with this damn arthritis!"

Gerald narrowed his eyes and worried his way through a series of facial tics. She'd never worked a day in her life. Outside the sky was darkening. Unidentifiable creaks and bangs sounded from a distance.

"You're just going to have to get back out there, aren't you? Nobody's going to make our bed for us," she continued, "you listening to me, Gerald? Back on that horse first thing tomorrow."

Gerald walked to the refrigerator, opened it, and grabbed a beer. He sat back down and watched his wife's jabbering mouth. He took a long swig from his bottle, set it down, and glared into her face. The raging storm continued to knock over anything that gusted in its path. Gerald took another long swig. His wife's mouth surged forward like a mutiny. A savage, uncontrollable silence blazed out of Gerald as he grabbed her throat and started to throttle her.



“I could kill you right now, old lady,” he hissed through tightened lips.

His wife’s eyes swelled into huge purple orbits. Her bulging face ignited from within. A fork in her right hand reached up and embedded itself into Gerald’s cheek. He screamed and lurched back, pulling at his face. A chair knocked over and Gerald fell with it. His wife dropped back into hers, clawing for air, while the prevailing westerlies spiraled and twisted their world into one rabid knot. ¶

Ways of Everywhere

§

Brittany Durk

Rain patterns on black
Tar street plantations
Cars whiz past
Buzzing sprays of dew
To catch my skin
Sweet as summer
Rain
Patterns on
Black
Streetlamps
Dropping oval
Sheets of shimmer gold
Lain and drowning
Upon roads upon roads
Casting robes of textured silk
Illusions
On concrete ground
Lip marks on sidewalks

Kisses from heaven’s tears
Feet sticking in steps as I
Half swim
Half tip toe
In this machinery
Of dusty industrial
City patch
And I know this way is everywhere
And I know all places are any place
And I know all songs are
Singing
Constantly
Floating
Through city patches and
Street plantations
These rain patterns on black
And I know this way is everywhere ¶



Snow Job

§

KJ

Boy who sprints at a snowman iced over by his brother,
you are beyond the pail your brother clutches as the wad
of a grin fractures in angelic whites and yellows across his
snickering maw so warm from the soup mother hath wrought.

The red, gushing joy thrumming in your woven veins keeps you
humming full bore like a juvenile juggernaut with a shiny morning
star whirligig swirling in lambent rings above your tender skull.
Lumps of the snowman's distending blank, gray body wait, cold.

Your scarf wags a happy, viridian hue against Sunday's clean, blue sky.
In childish pride, you drop your blunt head and guide it with the stolen
gold you hide in your eyes from a bereft sun that lies in the firmament
radiating argent light like a quarter wished to the tiled floor of a fountain.

Flesh mashes frigid, packed snow. A wail wells up in the burgeoning fright in
your lips until you let loose like an old mule kicking off a once nascent burden.
Tear ducts burst on you like two neatly packed snowballs popping on concrete.
Mother comes running as a dish cracks in the sink. Your brother embarks on
a fool's errand to bring up the rear in his daffy flying ace hat and dark goggles,
but Mother pinches up his ear again. She will not have soup enough for you... ¶



Half Mast Spring § Carrie Ann Riddell

I was six when Aunt Harriet died. Almost too young to remember. But I do recall that green-grey spring viewed through a nursery window, the garden below and those clusters of tulips hanging their heads beneath the rain.

“Never seen it rain so fine,” you said, as you stroked my hair and I didn’t reply. Silence seemed safe on this strange April day, a blanket of warmth, snug and tight. I drew up my knees, hugging them to me gently as I rocked, for fear even whispered words might break my fragile cocoon.

I’d no desire to move, let alone go back downstairs. Seeing Father, the way he was, had frightened me. Mother too. Her white linen apron replaced with sombre lines and starched, black warnings, shooing us sternly away.

“No place for children,” she cried, as through the crash, the wail, the silence which followed, you acted as a brother should. Standing behind me, sentry on guard, protecting your queen in pretence. “Ignore the noise,” you told me. “Father will be just fine.” A soldier aged twelve - so different, I thought. Quite unlike your usual

role. Villain to my heroine, your tragic lady fair. Yet here we were...

No more Boy’s Own adventures. No stories to scare me to tears. No talk of crime, or death or murder at all.

Memories. Fragmented. Eyes searching the solemn grounds. Colour drained from our lawns of childish games. Like a scrap-book, sepia photograph, seen through a mosaic frame - there in long grass, out on those paths, where you raised your wooden sword, scattered, blood-red petals swept away.

Through the drizzle, the tulips looked sad and out of place. Ashamed, perhaps, of their vibrant shade, they bowed like dubious mourners in scarlet hats. Smiles hidden in blossoms closed up, leafy ribbons trailing on through the grounds; across the crazy paving slabs, darkened by layered shadows cast by trees and the walls of the outhouse, where washing lines with their poles between, were dipping, dripping down.

I’d often seen Aunt Harriet there, hanging out her patterned dresses. Silk underwear too, and while Father



laughed, it was clear Mother didn't approve. Such flagrant exhibition. In breach of common decency. Time her husband's sister covered up. A good time girl, she called her. A tart, if truth be told. But, Father never saw her this way at all.

"At least she's got a heart," I heard him roar at Mother once. "At least there's human blood running through her veins."

Later, you said that's what killed her. Her lust for life. Her love of Man... Or men? She could never choose.

Two suitors, one fight in a bar. A knife was drawn and Aunt Harriet stepped between.

You said you didn't cry and yet, I wonder...

What were you thinking then? In those minutes or hours - I couldn't tell which - we spent looking out of that nursery window, seeing what we did?

Father, stepping from the outhouse, no coat on his back, despite the rain. Head in hands, perched on the long wet step. He seemed unaware of the water pouring out from the broken guttering above. Down, down, under his loosened collar. Down, down, soaking the back of his neck. His shirt was drenched in the end, sticking like a wrinkled second skin, transparent in places, yet in others, quite opaque.

Did you wonder what was going through his mind? Did you see his tears, despite the rain? Did you notice, as I'm sure he did, that lonely silken slip upon the line?

Blood-red as the tulips, a forgotten piece of underwear, bedraggled like a flag at half-mast in the aftermath of a storm.

"Don't let it happen to you," you said, touching my hair again, as I continued to stare.

Father. Mother. Arms. Hands. Beckoning. Offering comfort. Lashing out and pushing away...

You never once mentioned Harriet's name. Never once knelt down to look at me. Not then, and rarely since. This tiny blonde girl, named after her aunt, who

everyone always said was just like her...

I wonder if I am? And if you're still my soldier, too? Now Father's gone, and the men in my life pass by in a sad parade.

I'll try not to step between them, out of line as she did. And I'll try not to wear the scarlet silk too long. But in this season of structured lawns, falling leaves and rain soaked mounds of twigs, I can't help thinking of bonfire night, how it's better for old vegetation to burn - one splendid flash, then gone - than be left to fester and rot, waiting for sunshine seasons of no return.

When did spring end, I wonder? When did it die for you? Was it on the day of Harriet's murder? Mother said you had a special bond, I'd never have thought it. And yet...

Strange the things that spill from people's mouths when following a hearse. Stranger still, the things which never do.

Again, you stand behind me, though in a different place, silent as the falling rain on sober wreaths arranged. Silver shimmers on mourners' black hats. Heads bowed, expressions hidden, rarely glancing up, for fear their eyes might spark revelation, whispered thoughts, passed back and forth between time tightened lips. The softer the cloud, the less chance of thunder. The more complete the grey, the fewer shadows appear.

"Never seen it rain so fine," you said, as we looked through that nursery window, each of us inside our own cocoon. We're still there in many ways. Even now. Each with our own fractured thoughts and memories. Of Father, Mother... Aunt Harriet... Who was she, I wonder, to you?

Just someone from the past, who shared your sister's name, her look, her ways, immortalising spring only ever seen at half-mast. ¶



Sometimes

§

Brittany Durk

Sometimes I catch your reflection
In the mirror
While brushing my teeth
And I cringe in disappointment
Sometimes I just
Avert my gaze

Sometimes I am lost
Spiraling into the void
At others, I am found
Secure and warm
Not unsure

Sometimes I am single and free
Laughing
And dangerously flirtatious
But then again

Sometimes I am married

At just the right age
Neat and clean
No children to mess up the new furniture
Only two little dogs
Who shed all over everything
Sometimes I cannot sleep at night

Sometimes
I want to crawl out of my skin
(And then what?!)

...And sometimes
I sleep for ten hours
Dreamless

Sometimes I go
For days or
Weeks or
Months...



And I forget who I am
And sometimes I am sad
Because I remember
(Just don't fit into the box anymore)

Sometimes I just want to be
A L O N E.

Sometimes he understands...
And sometimes
He does
Not
Sometimes I don't care
(Like today and yesterday and the day before)

Sometimes I realize
I am so lucky
I should be grateful
Right now
Not so much

Sometimes I drink too much
(Like now)
And I wonder if I am still
The same girl I was
When I was fifteen
And sometimes

I am relieved
I am not

Sometimes
I hate myself

Sometimes
I wish I had the nerve to call you
But not today
Because sometimes
You are single
But not
Today

Today
You are married
Sometimes you have two children already.
And time really does fly by
And sometimes...
No.
Today
I am married
And
Sometimes
I just wait
For time to pass. ¶



Melanctha, continued from 31.

from the ships to the warehouses.

The men would call out, “Say, Sis, look out or we’ll come and catch yer,” or “Hi, there, you yaller girl, come here and we’ll take you sailin’.” And then, too, Melanctha would learn to know some of the serious foreign sailors who told her all sorts of wonders, and a cook would sometimes take her and her friends over a ship and show where he made his messes and where the men slept, and where the shops were, and how everything was made by themselves, right there, on ship board.

Melanctha loved to see these dark and smelly places.

She always loved to watch and talk and listen with men who worked hard. But it was never from these rougher people that Melanctha tried to learn the ways that lead to wisdom. In the daylight she always liked to talk with rough men and to listen to their lives and about their work and their various ways of doing, but when the darkness covered everything all over, Melanctha would meet, and stand, and talk with a clerk or a young shipping agent who had seen her watching, and so it was that she would try to learn to understand. And then Melanctha was fond of watching men work on new buildings. She loved to see them hoisting, digging, sawing and stone cutting. Here, too, in the daylight, she always learned to know the common workmen. “Heh, Sis, look out or that rock will fall on you and smash you all up into little pieces. Do you think you would make a nice jelly?” And then they would all laugh and feel that their jokes were very funny. And “Say, you pretty yaller girl, would it scare you bad to stand up here on top where I be? See if you’ve got grit and come up here where I can hold you. All you got to do is to sit still on that there rock that they’re just hoistin’, and then when you get here I’ll hold you tight, don’t you be scared Sis.”

Sometimes Melanctha would do some of these things that had much danger, and always with such men, she showed her power and her break neck courage. Once she slipped and fell from a high place. A workman caught her and so she was not killed, but her left arm was badly

broken.

All the men crowded around her. They admired her boldness in doing and in bearing pain when her arm was broken. They all went along with her with great respect to the doctor, and then they took her home in triumph and all of them were bragging about her not squealing.

James Herbert was home where his wife lived, that day.

He was furious when he saw the workmen and Melanctha. He drove the men away with curses so that they were all very nearly fighting, and he would not let a doctor come in to attend Melanctha. “Why don’t you see to that girl better, you, you’re her mother.”

James Herbert did not fight things out now any more with his daughter. He feared her tongue, and her school learning, and the way she had of saying things that were very nasty to a brutal black man who knew nothing. And Melanctha just then hated him very badly in her suffering.

And so this was the way Melanctha lived the four years of her beginning as a woman. And many things happened to Melanctha, but she knew very well that none of them had led her on to the right way, that certain way that was to lead her to world wisdom.

Melanctha Herbert was sixteen when she first met Jane Harden. Jane was a negress, but she was so white that hardly any one could guess it. Jane had had a good deal of education. She had been two years at a colored college. She had had to leave because of her bad conduct. She taught Melanctha many things. She taught her how to go the ways that lead to wisdom.

Jane Harden was at this time twenty-three years old and she had had much experience. She was very much attracted by Melanctha, and Melanctha was very proud that this Jane would let her know her.

Jane Harden was not afraid to understand. Melanctha who had strong the sense for real experience, knew that here was a woman who had learned to understand. Jane Harden had many bad habits. She drank a great deal, and



she wandered widely. She was safe though now, when she wanted to be safe, in this wandering. Melanctha Herbert soon always wandered with her. Melanctha tried the drinking and some of the other habits, but she did not find that she cared very much to do them. But every day she grew stronger in her desire to really understand.

It was now no longer, even in the daylight, the rougher men that these two learned to know in their wanderings, and for Melanctha the better classes were now a little higher. It was no longer express agents and clerks that she learned to know, but men in business, commercial travelers, and even men above these, and Jane and she would talk and walk and laugh and escape from them all very often. It was still the same, the knowing of them and the always just escaping, only now for Melanctha somehow it was different, for though it was always the same thing that happened it had a different flavor, for now Melanctha was with a woman who had wisdom, and dimly she began to see what it was that she should understand. It was not from the men that Melanctha learned her wisdom. It was always Jane Harden herself who was making Melanctha begin to understand.

Jane was a roughened woman. She had power and she liked to use it, she had much white blood and that made her see clear, she liked drinking and that made her reckless. Her white blood was strong in her and she had grit and endurance and a vital courage. She was always game, however much she was in trouble. She liked Melanctha Herbert for the things that she had like her, and then Melanctha was young, and she had sweetness, and a way of listening with intelligence and sympathetic interest, to the stories that Jane Harden often told out of her experience.

Jane grew always fonder of Melanctha. Soon they began to wander, more to be together than to see men and learn their various ways of working. Then they began not to wander, and Melanctha would spend long hours with Jane in her room, sitting at her feet and listening to her stories, and feeling her strength and the power of her affection, and slowly she began to see clear before her one certain way that would be sure to lead to wisdom.

Before the end came, the end of the two years in which Melanctha spent all her time when she was not at school or in her home, with Jane Harden, before these two years were finished, Melanctha had come to see very clear, and she had come to be very certain, what it is that gives the world its wisdom.

Jane Harden always had a little money and she had a room in the lower part of the town. Jane had once taught in a colored school. She had had to leave that too on account of her bad conduct. It was her drinking that always made all the trouble for her, for that can never be really covered over.

Jane's drinking was always growing worse upon her. Melanctha had tried to do the drinking but it had no real attraction for her.

In the first year, between Jane Harden and Melanctha Herbert, Jane had been much the stronger. Jane loved Melanctha and she found her always intelligent and brave and sweet and docile, and Jane meant to, and before the year was over she had taught Melanctha what it is that gives many people in the world their wisdom.

Jane had many ways in which to do this teaching. She told Melanctha many things. She loved Melanctha hard and made Melanctha feel it very deeply. She would be with other people and with men and with Melanctha, and she would make Melanctha understand what everybody wanted, and what one did with power when one had it.

Melanctha sat at Jane's feet for many hours in these days and felt Jane's wisdom. She learned to love Jane and to have this feeling very deeply. She learned a little in these days to know joy, and she was taught too how very keenly she could suffer. It was very different this suffering from that Melanctha sometimes had from her mother and from her very unendurable black father. Then she was fighting and she could be strong and valiant in her suffering, but here with Jane Harden she was longing and she bent and pleaded with her suffering.

It was a very tumultuous, very mingled year, this time for Melanctha, but she certainly did begin to really understand.



In every way she got it from Jane Harden. There was nothing good or bad in doing, feeling, thinking or in talking, that Jane spared her. Sometimes the lesson came almost too strong for Melanctha, but somehow she always managed to endure it and so slowly, but always with increasing strength and feeling, Melanctha began to really understand.

Then slowly, between them, it began to be all different. Slowly now between them, it was Melanctha Herbert, who was stronger. Slowly now they began to drift apart from one another.

Melanctha Herbert never really lost her sense that it was Jane Harden who had taught her, but Jane did many things that Melanctha now no longer needed.

And then, too, Melanctha never could remember right when it came to what she had done and what had happened. Melanctha now sometimes quarreled with Jane, and they no longer went about together, and sometimes Melanctha really forgot how much she owed to Jane Harden's teaching.

Melanctha began now to feel that she had always had world wisdom. She really knew of course, that it was Jane who had taught her, but all that began to be covered over by the trouble between them, that was now always getting stronger.

Jane Harden was a roughened woman. Once she had been very strong, but now she was weakened in all her kinds of strength by her drinking. Melanctha had tried the drinking but it had had no real attraction for her. Jane's strong and roughened nature and her drinking made it always harder for her to forgive Melanctha, that now Melanctha did not really need her any longer. Now it was Melanctha who was stronger and it was Jane who was dependent on her.

Melanctha was now come to be about eighteen years old. She was a graceful, pale yellow, good looking, intelligent, attractive negress, a little mysterious sometimes in her ways, and always good and pleasant, and always ready to do things for people.

Melanctha from now on saw very little of Jane Harden.

Jane did not like that very well and sometimes she abused Melanctha, but her drinking soon covered everything all over.

It was not in Melanctha's nature to really lose her sense for Jane Harden. Melanctha all her life was ready to help Jane out in any of her trouble, and later, when Jane really went to pieces, Melanctha always did all that she could to help her.

But Melanctha Herbert was ready now herself to do teaching. Melanctha could do anything now that she wanted. Melanctha knew now what everybody wanted. Melanctha had learned how she might stay a little longer; she had learned that she must decide when she wanted really to stay longer, and she had learned how when she wanted to, she could escape.

And so Melanctha began once more to wander. It was all now for her very different. It was never rougher men now that she talked to, and she did not care much now to know white men of the, for her, very better classes. It was now something realler that Melanctha wanted, something that would move her very deeply, something that would fill her fully with the wisdom that was planted now within her, and that she wanted badly, should really wholly fill her.

Melanctha these days wandered very widely. She was always alone now when she wandered. Melanctha did not need help now to know, or to stay longer, or when she wanted, to escape.

Melanctha tried a great many men, in these days before she was really suited. It was almost a year that she wandered and then she met with a young mulatto. He was a doctor who had just begun to practice. He would most likely do well in the future, but it was not this that concerned Melanctha. She found him good and strong and gentle and very intellectual, and all her life Melanctha liked and wanted good and considerate people, and then too he did not at first believe in Melanctha. He held off and did not know what it was that Melanctha wanted.



Melanctha came to want him very badly. They began to know each other better.

Things began to be very strong between them. Melanctha wanted him so badly that now she never wandered. She just gave herself to this experience. Melanctha Herbert was now, all alone, in Bridgepoint.

She lived now with this colored woman and now with that one, and she sewed, and sometimes she taught a little in a colored school as substitute for some teacher. Melanctha had now no home nor any regular employment. Life was just commencing for Melanctha. She had youth and had learned wisdom, and she was graceful and pale yellow and very pleasant, and always ready to do things for people, and she was mysterious in her ways and that only made belief in her more fervent.

During the year before she met Jefferson Campbell, Melanctha had tried many kinds of men but they had none of them interested Melanctha very deeply. She met them, she was much with them, she left them, she would think perhaps this next time it would be more exciting, and always she found that for her it all had no real meaning. She could now do everything she wanted, she knew now everything that everybody wanted, and yet it all had no excitement for her. With these men, she knew she could learn nothing. She wanted some one that could teach her very deeply and now at last she was sure that she had found him, yes she really had it, before she had thought to look if in this man she would find it.

During this year 'Mis' Herbert as her neighbors called her, Melanctha's pale yellow mother was very sick, and in this year she died.

Melanctha's father during these last years did not come very often to the house where his wife lived and Melanctha. Melanctha was not sure that her father was now any longer here in Bridgepoint. It was Melanctha who was very good now to her mother. It was always Melanctha's way to be good to any one in trouble. Melanctha took good care of her mother. She did everything that any woman could, she tended and soothed and helped her pale yellow mother, and she

worked hard in every way to take care of her, and make her dying easy. But Melanctha did not in these days like her mother any better, and her mother never cared much for this daughter who was always a hard child to manage, and who had a tongue that always could be very nasty. Melanctha did everything that any woman could, and at last her mother died, and Melanctha had her buried. Melanctha's father was not heard from, and Melanctha in all her life after, never saw or heard or knew of anything that her father did.

It was the young doctor, Jefferson Campbell, who helped Melanctha toward the end, to take care of her sick mother. Jefferson Campbell had often before seen Melanctha Herbert, but he had never liked her very well, and he had never believed that she was any good. He had heard something about how she wandered. He knew a little too of Jane Harden, and he was sure that this Melanctha Herbert, who was her friend and who wandered, would never come to any good.

Dr. Jefferson Campbell was a serious, earnest, good young joyous doctor. He liked to take care of everybody and he loved his own colored people. He always found life very easy did Jeff Campbell, and everybody liked to have him with them. He was so good and sympathetic, and he was so earnest and so joyous. He sang when he was happy, and he laughed, and his was the free abandoned laughter that gives the warm broad glow to negro sunshine.

Jeff Campbell had never yet in his life had real trouble. Jefferson's father was a good, kind, serious, religious man. He was a very steady, very intelligent, and very dignified, light brown, grey haired negro. He was a butler and he had worked for the Campbell family many years, and his father and his mother before him had been in the service of this family as free people.

Jefferson Campbell's father and his mother had of course been regularly married. Jefferson's mother was a sweet, little, pale brown, gentle woman who revered and obeyed her good husband, and who worshipped and admired and loved hard her-good, earnest, cheery, hard working doctor boy who was her only child. Jeff



Campbell had been raised religious by his people but religion had never interested Jeff very much.

Jefferson was very good. He loved his people and he never hurt them, and he always did everything they wanted and that he could to please them, but he really loved best science and experimenting and to learn things, and he early wanted to be a doctor, and he was always very interested in the life of the colored people. The Campbell family had been very good to him and had helped him on with his ambition. Jefferson studied hard, he went to a colored college, and then he learnt to be a doctor.

It was now two or three years, that he had started in to practice. Everybody liked Jeff Campbell, he was so strong and kindly and cheerful and understanding, and he laughed so with pure joy, and he always liked to help all his own colored people.

Dr. Jeff knew all about Jane Harden. He had taken care of her in some of her bad trouble. He knew about Melanctha too, though until her mother was taken sick he had never met her. Then he was called in to help Melanctha to take care of her sick mother. Dr. Campbell did not like Melanctha's ways and he did not think that she would ever come to any good. Dr. Campbell had taken care of Jane Harden in some of her bad trouble. Jane sometimes had abused Melanctha to him. What right had that Melanctha Herbert who owed everything to her, Jane Harden, what right had a girl like that to go away to other men and leave her, but Melanctha Herbert never had any sense of how to act to anybody. Melanctha had a good mind, Jane never denied her that, but she never used it to do anything decent with it. But what could you expect when Melanctha had such a brute of a black nigger father, and Melanctha was always abusing her father and yet she was just like him, and really she admired him so much and he never had any sense of what he owed to anybody, and Melanctha was just like him and she was proud of it too, and it made Jane so tired to hear Melanctha talk all the time as if she wasn't. Jane Harden hated people who had good minds and didn't use them, and Melanctha always had that weakness, and

wanting to keep in with people, and never really saying that she wanted to be like her father, and it was so silly of Melanctha to abuse her father, when she was so much like him and she really liked it. No, Jane Harden had no use for Melanctha. Oh yes, Melanctha always came around to be good to her. Melanctha was always sure to do that. She never really went away and left one. She didn't use her mind enough to do things straight out like that. Melanctha Herbert had a good mind, Jane never denied that to her, but she never wanted to see or hear about Melanctha Herbert any more, and she wished Melanctha wouldn't come in any more to see her. She didn't hate her, but she didn't want to hear about her father and all that talk Melanctha always made, and that just meant nothing to her. Jane Harden was very tired of all that now. She didn't have any use now any more for Melanctha, and if Dr. Campbell saw her he better tell her Jane didn't want to see her, and she could take her talk to somebody else, who was ready to believe her. And then Jane Harden would drop away and forget Melanctha and all her life before, and then she would begin to drink and so she would cover everything all over.

Jeff Campbell heard all this very often, but it did not interest him very deeply. He felt no desire to know more of this Melanctha. He heard her, once, talking to another girl outside of the house, when he was paying a visit to Jane Harden. He did not see much in the talk that he heard her do. He did not see much in the things Jane Harden said when she abused Melanctha to him. He was more interested in Jane herself than in anything he heard about Melanctha. He knew Jane Harden had a good mind, and she had had power, and she could really have done things, and now this drinking covered everything all over. Jeff Campbell was always very sorry when he had to see it. Jane Harden was a roughened woman, and yet Jeff found a great many strong good things in her, that still made him like her.

Jeff Campbell did everything he could for Jane Harden.

He did not care much to hear about Melanctha. He had no feeling, much, about her. He did not find that he took



any interest in her. Jane Harden was so much a stronger woman, and Jane really had had a good mind, and she had used it to do things with it, before this drinking business had taken such a hold upon her. Dr. Campbell was helping Melanctha Herbert to take care of her sick mother. He saw Melanctha now for long times and very often, and they sometimes talked a good deal together, but Melanctha never said anything to him about Jane Harden. She never talked to him about anything that was not just general matters, or about medicine, or to tell him funny stories. She asked him many questions and always listened very well to all he told her, and she always remembered everything she heard him say about doctoring, and she always remembered everything that she had learned from all the others.

Jeff Campbell never found that all this talk interested him very deeply. He did not find that he liked Melanctha when he saw her so much, any better. He never found that he thought much about Melanctha. He never found that he believed much in her having a good mind, like Jane Harden. He found he liked Jane Harden always better, and that he wished very much that she had never begun that bad drinking. Melanctha Herbert's mother was now always getting sicker. Melanctha really did everything that any woman could. Melanctha's mother never liked her daughter any better. She never said much, did 'Mis' Herbert, but anybody could see that she did not think much of this daughter.

Dr. Campbell now often had to stay a long time to take care of 'Mis' Herbert. One day 'Mis' Herbert was much sicker and Dr. Campbell thought that this night, she would surely die. He came back late to the house, as he had said he would, to sit up and watch 'Mis' Herbert, and to help Melanctha, if she should need anybody to be with her. Melanctha Herbert and Jeff Campbell sat up all that night together. 'Mis' Herbert did not die. The next day she was a little better.

This house where Melanctha had always lived with her mother was a little red brick, two story house. They had not much furniture to fill it and some of the windows were broken and not mended. Melanctha did not have

much money to use now on the house, but with a colored woman, who was their neighbor and good natured and who had always helped them, Melanctha managed to take care of her mother and to keep the house fairly clean and neat.

Melanctha's mother was in bed in a room upstairs, and the steps from below led right up into it. There were just two rooms on this upstairs floor. Melanctha and Dr. Campbell sat down on the steps, that night they watched together, so that they could hear and see Melanctha's mother and yet the light would be shaded, and they could sit and read, if they wanted to, and talk low some, and yet not disturb 'Mis' Herbert.

Dr. Campbell was always very fond of reading. Dr. Campbell had not brought a book with him that night. He had just forgotten it. He had meant to put something in his pocket to read, so that he could amuse himself, while he was sitting there and watching. When he was through with taking care of 'Mis' Herbert, he came and sat down on the steps just above where Melanctha was sitting. He spoke about how he had forgotten to bring his book with him. Melanctha said there were some old papers in the house, perhaps Dr. Campbell could find something in them that would help pass the time for a while for him. All right, Dr. Campbell said, that would be better than just sitting there with nothing. Dr. Campbell began to read through the old papers that Melanctha gave him. When anything amused him in them, he read it out to Melanctha. Melanctha was now pretty silent, with him. Dr. Campbell began to feel a little, about how she responded to him. Dr. Campbell began to see a little that perhaps Melanctha had a good mind. Dr. Campbell was not sure yet that she had a good mind, but he began to think a little that perhaps she might have one.

Jefferson Campbell always liked to talk to everybody about the things he worked at and about his thinking about what he could do for the colored people. Melanctha Herbert never thought about these things the way that he did. Melanctha had never said much to Dr. Campbell about what she thought about them. Melanctha did not feel the same as he did about being good and regular in



life, and not having excitements all the time, which was the way that Jefferson Campbell wanted that everybody should be, so that everybody would be wise and yet be happy. Melanctha always had strong the sense for real experience. Melanctha Herbert did not think much of this way of coming to real wisdom.

Dr. Campbell soon got through with his reading, in the old newspapers, and then somehow he began to talk along about the things he was always thinking. Dr. Campbell said he wanted to work so that he could understand what troubled people, and not to just have excitements, and he believed you ought to love your father and your mother and to be regular in all your life, and not to be always wanting new things and excitements, and to always know where you were, and what you wanted, and to always tell everything just as you meant it. That's the only kind of life he knew or believed in, Jeff Campbell repeated. "No I ain't got any use for all the time being in excitements and wanting to have all kinds of experience all the time. I got plenty of experience just living regular and quiet and with my family, and doing my work, and taking care of people, and trying to understand it. I don't believe much in this running around business and I. don't want to see the colored people do it. I am a colored man and I ain't sorry, and I want to see the colored people like what is good and what I want them to have, and that's to live regular and work hard and understand things, and that's enough to keep any decent man excited." Jeff Campbell spoke now with some anger. Not to Melanctha, he did not think of her at all when he was talking. It was the life he wanted that he spoke to, and the way he wanted things to be with the colored people.

But Melanctha Herbert had listened to him say all this. She knew he meant it, but it did not mean much to her, and she was sure some day he would find out, that it was not all, of real wisdom. Melanctha knew very well what it was to have real wisdom. "But how about Jane Harden?" said Melanctha to Jeff Campbell, "seems to me Dr. Campbell you find her to have something in her, and you go there very often, and you talk to her much more than you do to the nice girls that stay at home with their people, the kind you say you are really wanting. It

don't seem to me Dr. Campbell, that what you say and what you do seem to have much to do with each other. And about your being so good Dr. Campbell," went on Melanctha, "You don't care about going to church much yourself, and yet you always are saying you believe so much in things like that, for people. It seems to me, Dr. Campbell you want to have a good time just like all us others, and then you just keep on saying that it's right to be good and you ought not to have excitements, and yet you really don't want to do it Dr. Campbell, no more than me or Jane Harden. No, Dr. Campbell, it certainly does seem to me you don't know very well yourself, what you mean, when you are talking."

Jefferson had been talking right along, the way he always did when he got started, and now Melanctha's answer only made him talk a little harder. He laughed a little, too, but very low, so as not to disturb 'Mis' Herbert who was sleeping very nicely, and he looked brightly at Melanctha to enjoy her, and then he settled himself down to answer.

"Yes," he began, "it certainly does sound a little like I didn't know very well what I do mean, when you put it like that to me, Miss Melanctha, but that's just because you don't understand enough about what I meant, by what I was just saying to you. I don't say, never, I don't want to know all kinds of people, Miss Melanctha, and I don't say there ain't many kinds of people, and I don't say ever, that I don't find some like Jane Harden very good to know and talk to, but it's the strong things I like in Jane Harden, not all her excitements. I don't admire the bad things she does, Miss Melanctha, but Jane Harden is a strong woman and I always respect that in her. No I know you don't believe what I say, Miss Melanctha, but I mean it, and it's all just because you don't understand it when I say it. And as for religion, that just ain't my way of being good, Miss Melanctha, but it's a good way for many people to be good and regular in their way of living, and if they believe it, it helps them to be good, and if they're honest in it, I like to see them have it. No, what I don't like, Miss Melanctha, is this what I see so much with the colored people, their always wanting new things just to get excited."



Jefferson Campbell here stopped himself in this talking. Melanctha Herbert did not make any answer. They both sat there very quiet.

Jeff Campbell then began again on the old papers. He sat there on the steps just above where Melanctha was sitting, and he went on with his reading, and his head went moving up and down, and sometimes he was reading, and sometimes he was thinking about all the things he wanted to be doing, and then he would rub the back of his dark hand over his mouth, and in between he would be frowning with his thinking, and sometimes he would be rubbing his head hard to help his thinking. And Melanctha just sat still and watched the lamp burning, and sometimes she turned it down a little, when the wind caught it and it would begin to get to smoking.

And so Jeff Campbell and Melanctha Herbert sat there on the steps, very quiet, a long time, and they didn't seem to think much, that they were together. They sat there so, for about an hour, and then it came to Jefferson very slowly and as a strong feeling that he was sitting there on the steps, alone, with Melanctha. He did not know if Melanctha Herbert was feeling very much about their being there alone together. Jefferson began to wonder about it a little. Slowly he felt that surely they must both have this feeling. It was so important that he knew that she must have it. They both sat there, very quiet, a long time. At last Jefferson began to talk about how the lamp was smelling. Jefferson began to explain what it is that makes a lamp get to smelling. Melanctha let him talk. She did not answer, and then he stopped in his talking. Soon Melanctha began to sit up straighter and then she started in to question.

“About what you was just saying Dr. Campbell about living regular and all that, I certainly don't understand what you meant by what you was just saying. You ain't a bit like good people Dr. Campbell, like the good people you are always saying are just like you. I know good people Dr. Campbell, and you ain't a bit like men who are good and got religion. You are just as free and easy as any man can be Dr. Campbell, and you always like to be with Jane Harden, and she is a pretty bad one and

you don't look down on her and you never tell her she is a bad one. I know you like her just like a friend Dr. Campbell, and so I certainly don't understand just what it is you mean by all that you was just saying to me. I know you mean honest Dr. Campbell, and I am always trying to believe you, but I can't say as I see just what you mean when you say you want to be good and real pious, because I am very certain Dr. Campbell that you ain't that kind of a man at all, and you ain't never ashamed to be with queer folks Dr. Campbell, and you seem to be thinking what you are doing is just like what you are always saying, and Dr. Campbell, I certainly don't just see what you mean by what you say.”

Dr. Campbell almost laughed loud enough to wake 'Mis' Herbert. He did enjoy the way Melanctha said these things to him. He began to feel very strongly about it that perhaps Melanctha really had a good mind. He was very free now in his laughing, but not so as to make Melanctha angry. He was very friendly with her in his laughing, and then he made his face get serious, and he rubbed his head to help him in his thinking.

“I know Miss Melanctha” he began, “It ain't very easy for you to understand what I was meaning by what I was just saying to you, and perhaps some of the good people I like so wouldn't think very much, any more than you do, Miss Melanctha, about the ways I have to be good. But that's no matter Miss Melanctha. What I mean Miss Melanctha by what I was just saying to you is, that I don't, no, never, believe in doing things just to get excited. You see Miss Melanctha I mean the way so many of the colored people do it. Instead of just working hard and caring about their working and living regular with their families and saving up all their money, so they will have some to bring up their children better, instead of living regular and doing like that and getting all their new ways from just decent living, the colored people just keep running around and perhaps drinking and doing everything bad they can ever think of, and not just because they like all those bad things that they are always doing, but only just because they want to get excited. No Miss Melanctha, you see I am a colored man myself and I ain't sorry, and I want to see



the colored people being good and careful and always honest and living always just as regular as can be, and I am sure Miss Melanctha, that that way everybody can have a good time, and be happy and keep right and be busy, and not always have to be doing bad things for new ways to get excited. Yes Miss Melanctha, I certainly do like everything to be good, and quiet, and I certainly do think that is the best way for all us colored people. No, Miss Melanctha too, I don't mean this except only just the way I say it. I ain't got any other meaning Miss Melanctha, and it's that what I mean when I am saying about being really good.

It ain't Miss Melanctha to be pious and not liking every kind of people, and I don't say ever Miss Melanctha that when other kind of people come regular into your life you shouldn't want to know them always. What I mean Miss Melanctha by what I am always saying is, you shouldn't try to know everybody just to run around and get excited. It's that kind of way of doing that I hate so always Miss Melanctha, and that is so bad for all us colored people. I don't know as you understand now any better what I mean by what I was just saying to you. But you certainly do know now Miss Melanctha,

that I always mean it what I say when I am talking.”

“Yes I certainly do understand you when you talk so Dr. Campbell. I certainly do understand now what you mean by what you was always saying to me. I certainly do understand Dr. Campbell that you mean you don't believe it's right to love anybody.” “Why sure no, yes I do Miss Melanctha, I certainly do believe strong in loving, and in being good to everybody, and trying to understand what they all need, to help them.” “Oh I know all about that way of doing Dr. Campbell, but that certainly ain't the kind of love I mean when I am talking. I mean real, strong, hot love Dr. Campbell, that makes you do anything for somebody that loves you.”

“I don't know much about that kind of love yet Miss Melanctha. You see it's this way with me always Miss Melanctha. I am always so busy with my thinking about my work I am doing and so I don't have time for just fooling, and then too, you see Miss Melanctha, I really

certainly don't ever like to get excited, and that kind of loving hard does seem always to mean just getting all the time excited. That certainly is what I always think from what I see of them that have it bad Miss Melanctha, and that certainly would never suit a man like me. You see Miss Melanctha I am a very quiet kind of fellow, and I believe in a quiet life for all the colored people. No Miss Melanctha I certainly never have mixed myself up in that kind of trouble.”

“Yes I certainly do see that very clear Dr. Campbell,” said Melanctha, “I see that's certainly what it is always made me not know right about you and that's certainly what it is that makes you really mean what you was always saying. You certainly are just too scared Dr. Campbell to really feel things way down in you. All you are always wanting Dr. Campbell, is just to talk about being good, and to play with people just to have a good time, and yet always to certainly keep yourself out of trouble. It don't seem to me Dr. Campbell that I admire that way to do things very much. It certainly ain't really to me being very good. It certainly ain't any more to me Dr. Campbell, but that you certainly are awful scared about really feeling things way down in you, and that's certainly the only way Dr. Campbell I can see that you can mean, by what it is that you are always saying to me.”

“I don't know about that Miss Melanctha, I certainly don't think I can't feel things very deep in me, though I do say I certainly do like to have things nice and quiet, but I don't see harm in keeping out of danger Miss Melanctha, when a man knows he certainly don't want to get killed in it, and I don't know anything that's more awful dangerous Miss Melanctha than being strong in love with somebody. I don't mind sickness or real trouble Miss Melanctha, and I don't want to be talking about what I can do in real trouble, but you know something about that Miss Melanctha, but I certainly don't see much in mixing up just to get excited, in that awful kind of danger. No Miss Melanctha I certainly do only know just two kinds of ways of loving. One kind of loving seems to me, is like one has a good quiet feeling in a family when one does his work, and is always living



good and being regular, and then the other way of loving is just like having it like any animal that's low in the streets together, and that don't seem to me very good Miss Melanctha, though I don't say ever that it's not all right when anybody likes it, and that's all the kinds of love I know Miss Melanctha, and I certainly don't care very much to get mixed up in that kind of a way just to be in trouble."

Jefferson stopped and Melanctha thought a little.

"That certainly does explain to me Dr. Campbell what I been thinking about you this long time. I certainly did wonder how you could be so live, and knowing everything, and everybody, and talking so big always about everything, and everybody always liking you so much, and you always looking as if you was thinking, and yet you really was never knowing about anybody and certainly not being really very understanding. It certainly is all Dr. Campbell because you is so afraid you will be losing being good so easy, and it certainly do seem to me Dr. Campbell that it certainly don't amount to very much that kind of goodness."

"Perhaps you are right Miss Melanctha," Jefferson answered. "I don't say never, perhaps you ain't right Miss Melanctha. Perhaps I ought to know more about such ways Miss Melanctha. Perhaps it would help me some, taking care of the colored people, Miss Melanctha. I don't say, no, never, but perhaps I could learn a whole lot about women the right way, if I had a real good teacher."

'Mis' Herbert just then stirred a little in her sleep.

Melanctha went up the steps to the bed to attend her. Dr. Campbell got up too and went to help her. 'Mis' Herbert woke up and was a little better. Now it was morning and Dr. Campbell gave his directions to Melanctha, and then left her.

Melanctha Herbert all her life long, loved and wanted good, kind and considerate people. Jefferson Campbell was all the things that Melanctha had ever wanted. Jefferson was a strong, well built, good looking, cheery, intelligent and good mulatto. And then at first he had

not cared to know Melanctha, and when he did begin to know her he had not liked her very well, and he had not thought that she would ever come to any good. And then Jefferson Campbell was so very gentle. Jefferson never did some things like other men, things that now were beginning to be ugly, for Melanctha. And then too Jefferson Campbell did not seem to know very well what it was that Melanctha really wanted, and all this was making Melanctha feel his power with her always getting stronger.

Dr. Campbell came in every day to see 'Mis' Herbert. 'Mis' Herbert, after that night they watched together, did get a little better, but 'Mis' Herbert was really very sick, and soon it was pretty sure that she would have to die. Melanctha certainly did everything, all the time, that any woman could. Jefferson never thought much better of Melanctha while she did it. It was not her being good, he wanted to find in her. He knew very well Jane Harden was right, when she said Melanctha was always being good to everybody but that that did not make Melanctha any better for her. Then too, 'Mis' Herbert never liked Melanctha any better, even on the last day of her living, and so Jefferson really never thought much of Melanctha's always being good to her mother.

Jefferson and Melanctha now saw each other, very often. They now always liked to be with each other, and they always now had a good time when they talked to one another. They, mostly in their talking to each other, still just talked about outside things and what they were thinking. Except just in little moments, and not those very often, they never said anything about their feeling. Sometimes Melanctha would tease Jefferson a little just to show she had not forgotten, but mostly she listened to his talking, for Jefferson still always liked to talk along about the things he believed in. Melanctha was liking Jefferson Campbell better every day, and Jefferson was beginning to know that Melanctha certainly had a good mind, and he was beginning to feel a little her real sweetness. Not in her being good to 'Mis' Herbert, that never seemed to Jefferson to mean much in her, but there was a strong kind of sweetness in Melanctha's nature that Jefferson began now to feel when he was with her.



'Mis' Herbert was now always getting sicker. One night again Dr. Campbell felt very certain that before it was morning she would surely die. Dr. Campbell said he would come back to help Melanctha watch her, and to do anything he could to make 'Mis' Herbert's dying more easy for her. Dr. Campbell came back that evening, after he was through with his other patients, and then he made 'Mis' Herbert easy, and then he came and sat down on the steps just above where Melanctha was sitting with the lamp, and looking very tired. Dr. Campbell was pretty tired too, and they both sat there ery quiet.

"You look awful tired to-night, Dr. Campbell," Melanctha said at last, with her voice low and very gentle, "Don't you want to go lie down and sleep a little? You're always being much too good to everybody, Dr. Campbell. I like to have you stay here watching to-night with me, but it don't seem right you ought to stay here when you got so much always to do for everybody. You are certainly very kind to come back, Dr. Campbell, but I can certainly get along tonight without you. I can get help next door sure if I need it. You just go 'long home to bed, Dr. Campbell. You certainly do look as if you need it."

Jefferson was silent for some time, and always he was looking very gently at Melanctha.

"I certainly never did think, Miss Melanctha, I would find you to be so sweet and thinking, with me." "Dr. Campbell" said Melanctha, still more gentle, "I certainly never did think that you would ever feel it good to like me. I certainly never did think you would want to see for yourself if I had sweet ways in me."

They both sat there very tired, very gentle, very quiet, a long time. At last Melanctha in a low, even tone began to talk to Jefferson Campbell.

"You are certainly a very good man, Dr. Campbell, I certainly do feel that more every day I see you. Dr. Campbell, I sure do want to be friends with a good man like you, now I know you. You certainly, Dr. Campbell, never do things like other men, that's always ugly for me. Tell me true, Dr. Campbell, how you feel about

being always friends with me. I certainly do know, Dr. Campbell, you are a good man, and if you say you will be friends with me, you certainly never will go back on me, the way so many kinds of them do to every girl they ever get to like them. Tell me for true, Dr. Campbell, will you be friends with me."

"Why, Miss Melanctha," said Campbell slowly, "why you see I just can't say that right out that way to you. Why sure you know Miss Melanctha, I will be very glad if it comes by and by that we are always friends together, but you see, Miss Melanctha, I certainly am a very slow-minded quiet kind of fellow though I do say quick things all the time to everybody, and when I certainly do want to mean it what I am saying to you, I can't say things like that right out to everybody till I know really more for certain all about you, and how I like you, and what I really mean to do better for you. You certainly do see what I mean, Miss Melanctha." "I certainly do admire you for talking honest to me, Jeff Campbell," said Melanctha. "Oh, I am always honest, Miss Melanctha. It's easy enough for me always to be honest, Miss Melanctha. All I got to do is always just to say right out what I am thinking. I certainly never have got any real reason for not saying it right out like that to anybody."

They sat together, very silent. "I certainly do wonder, Miss Melanctha," at last began Jeff Campbell, "I certainly do wonder, if we know very right, you and me, what each other is really thinking. I certainly do wonder, Miss Melanctha, if we know at all really what each other means by what we are always saying." "That certainly do mean, by what you say, that you think I am a bad one, Jeff Campbell," flashed out Melanctha.

"Why no, Miss Melanctha, why sure I don't mean any thing like that at all, by what I am saying to you. You know well as I do, Miss Melanctha, I think better of you every day I see you, and I like to talk with you all the time now, Miss Melanctha, and I certainly do think we both like it very well when we are together, and it seems to me always more, you are very good and sweet always to everybody. It only is, I am really so slowminded in



my ways, Miss Melanctha, for all I talk so quick to everybody, and I don't like to say to you what I don't know for very sure, and I certainly don't know for sure I know just all what you mean by what you are always saying to me. And you see, Miss Melanctha, that's what makes me say what I was just saying to you when you asked me."

"I certainly do thank you again for being honest to me, Dr. Campbell," said Melanctha. "I guess I leave you now, Dr. Campbell. I think I go in the other room and rest a little. I leave you here, so perhaps if I ain't here you will maybe sleep and rest yourself a little. Good night now, Dr. Campbell, I call you if I need you later to help me, Dr. Campbell, I hope you rest well, Dr. Campbell."

Jeff Campbell, when Melanctha left him, sat there and he was very quiet and just wondered. He did not know very well just what Melanctha meant by what she was always saying to him. He did not know very well how much he really knew about Melanctha Herbert. He wondered if he should go on being so much all the time with her. He began to think about what he should do now with her. Jefferson Campbell was a man who liked everybody and many people liked very much to be with him. Women liked him, he was so strong, and good, and understanding, and innocent, and firm, and gentle. Sometimes they seemed to want very much he should be with them. When they got so, they always had made Campbell very tired. Sometimes he would play a little with them, but he never had had any strong feeling for them. Now with Melanctha Herbert everything seemed different. Jefferson was not sure that he knew here just what he wanted. He was not sure he knew just what it was that Melanctha wanted. He knew if it was only play, with Melanctha, that he did not want to do it. But he remembered always how she had told him he never knew how to feel things very deeply. He remembered how she told him he was afraid to let himself ever know real feeling, and then too, most of all to him, she had told him he was not very understanding. That always troubled Jefferson very keenly, he wanted very badly to be really understanding. If Jefferson only knew better just what Melanctha meant by what she said. Jefferson always

had thought he knew something about women. Now he found that really he knew nothing. He did not know the least bit about Melanctha. He did not know what it was right that he should do about it. He wondered if it was just a little play that they were doing. If it was a play he did not want to go on playing, but if it was really that he was not very understanding, and that with Melanctha Herbert he could learn to really understand, then he was very certain he did not want to be a coward. It was very hard for him to know what he wanted. He thought and thought, and always he did not seem to know any better what he wanted. At last he gave up this thinking. He felt sure it was only play with Melanctha. "No, I certainly won't go on fooling with her any more this way," he said at last out loud to himself, when he was through with this thinking. "I certainly will stop fooling, and begin to go on with my thinking about my work and what's the matter with people like 'Mis' Herbert," and Jefferson took out his book from his pocket, and drew near to the lamp, and began with some hard scientific reading.

Jefferson sat there for about an hour reading, and he had really forgotten all about his trouble with Melanctha's meaning. Then 'Mis' Herbert had some trouble with her breathing. She woke up and was gasping. Dr. Campbell went to her and gave her something that would help her. Melanctha came out from the other room and did things as he told her. They together made 'Mis' Herbert more comfortable and easy, and soon she was again in her deep sleep.

Dr. Campbell went back to the steps where he had been sitting. Melanctha came and stood a little while beside him, and then she sat down and watched him reading. By and by they began with their talking. Jeff Campbell began to feel that perhaps it was all different. Perhaps it was not just play, with Melanctha. Anyway he liked it very well that she was with him. He began to tell her about the book he was just reading.

Melanctha was very intelligent always in her questions.

Jefferson knew now very well that she had a good mind. They were having a very good time, talking there



together. And then they began again to get quiet. “It certainly was very good in you to come back and talk to me Miss Melanctha,” Jefferson said at last to her, for now he was almost certain, it was no game she was playing. Melanctha really was a good woman, and she had a good mind, and she had a real, strong sweetness, and she could surely really teach him. “Oh I always like to talk to you Dr. Campbell” said Melanctha, “And then you was only just honest to me, and I always like it when a man is really honest to me.” Then they were again very silent, sitting there together, with the lamp between them, that was always smoking. Melanctha began to lean a little more toward Dr. Campbell, where he was sitting, and then she took his hand between her two and pressed it hard, but she said nothing to him.

She let it go then and leaned a little nearer to him.

Jefferson moved a little but did not do anything in answer. At last, “Well,” said Melanctha sharply to him. “I was just thinking” began Dr. Campbell slowly, “I was just wondering,” he was beginning to get ready to go on with his talking. “Don’t you ever stop with your thinking long enough ever to have any feeling Jeff Campbell,” said Melanctha a little sadly. “I don’t know,” said Jeff Campbell slowly, “I don’t know Miss Melanctha much about that. No, I don’t stop thinking much Miss Melanctha and if I can’t ever feel without stopping thinking, I certainly am very much afraid Miss Melanctha that I never will do much with that kind of feeling. Sure you ain’t worried Miss Melanctha, about my really not feeling very much all the time. I certainly do think I feel some, Miss Melanctha, even though I always do it without ever knowing how to stop with my thinking.” “I am certainly afraid I don’t think much of your kind of feeling Dr. Campbell.” “Why I think you certainly are wrong Miss Melanctha I certainly do think I feel as much for you Miss Melanctha, as you ever feel about me, sure I do. I don’t think you know me right when you talk like that to me. Tell me just straight out how much do you care about me, Miss Melanctha.” “Care about you Jeff Campbell,” said Melanctha slowly. “I certainly do care for you Jeff Campbell less than you are always thinking and much more than you are ever

knowing.”

Jeff Campbell paused on this, and he was silent with the power of Melanctha’s meaning. They sat there together very silent, a long time. “Well Jeff Campbell,” said Melanctha. “Oh,” said Dr. Campbell and he moved himself a little, and then they were very silent a long time. “Haven’t you got nothing to say to me Jeff Campbell?” said Melanctha. “Why yes, what was it we were just saying about to one another. You see Miss Melanctha I am a very quiet, slow minded kind of fellow, and I am never sure I know just exactly what you mean by all that you are always saying to me. But I do like you very much Miss Melanctha and I am very sure you got very good things in you all the time. You sure do believe what I am saying to you Miss Melanctha.” “Yes I believe it when you say it to me, Jeff Campbell,” said Melanctha, and then she was silent and there was much sadness in it. “I guess I go in and lie down again Dr. Campbell,” said Melanctha. “Don’t go leave me Miss Melanctha,” said Jeff Campbell quickly. “Why not, what you want of me Jeff Campbell?” said Melanctha. “Why,” said Jeff Campbell slowly, “I just want to go on talking with you. I certainly do like talking about all kinds of things with you. You certainly know that all right, Miss Melanctha.” “I guess I go lie down again and leave you here with your thinking,” said Melanctha gently. “I certainly am very tired to night Dr. Campbell. Good night I hope you rest well Dr. Campbell.” Melanctha stooped over him, where he was sitting, to say this good night, and then, very quick and sudden, she kissed him and then, very quick again, she went away and left him.

Dr. Campbell sat there very quiet, with only a little thinking and sometimes a beginning feeling, and he was alone until it began to be morning, and then he went, and Melanctha helped him, and he made ‘Mis’ Herbert more easy in her dying. ‘Mis’ Herbert lingered on till about ten o’clock the next morning, and then slowly and without much pain she died away. Jeff Campbell staid till the last moment, with Melanctha, to make her mother’s dying easy for her. When it was over he sent in the colored woman from next door to help Melanctha fix things, and then he went away to take care of his other



patients. He came back very soon to Melanctha. He helped her to have a funeral for her mother. Melanctha then went to live with the good natured woman, who had been her neighbor. Melanctha still saw Jeff Campbell very often. Things began to be very strong between them. Melanctha now never wandered, unless she was with Jeff Campbell. Sometimes she and he wandered a good deal together. Jeff Campbell had not got over his way of talking to her all the time about all the things he was always thinking. Melanctha never talked much, now, when they were together. Sometimes Jeff Campbell teased her about her not talking to him. "I certainly did think Melanctha you was a great talker from the way Jane Harden and everybody said things to me, and from the way I heard you talk so much when I first met you. Tell me true Melanctha, why don't you talk more now to me, perhaps it is I talk so much I don't give you any chance to say things to me, or perhaps it is you hear me talk so much you don't think so much now of a whole lot of talking. Tell me honest Melanctha, why don't you talk more to me." "You know very well Jeff Campbell," said Melanctha "You certainly do know very well Jeff, you don't think really much, of my talking. You think a whole lot more about everything than I do Jeff, and you don't care much what I got to say about it. You know that's true what I am saying Jeff, if you want to be real honest, the way you always are when I like you so much." Jeff laughed and looked fondly at her. "I don't say ever I know, you ain't right, when you say things like that to me, Melanctha. You see you always like to be talking just what you think everybody wants to be hearing from you, and when you are like that, Melanctha, honest, I certainly don't care very much to hear you, but sometimes you say something that is what you are really thinking, and then I like a whole lot to hear you talking." Melanctha smiled, with her strong sweetness, on him, and she felt her power very deeply.

"I certainly never do talk very much when I like anybody really, Jeff. You see, Jeff, it ain't much use to talk about what a woman is really feeling in her. You see all that, Jeff, better, by and by, when you get to really feeling. You won't be so ready then always with

your talking. You see, Jeff, if it don't come true what I am saying." "I don't ever say you ain't always right, Melanctha," said Jeff Campbell. "Perhaps what I call my thinking ain't really so very understanding. I don't say, no never now any more, you ain't right, Melanctha, when you really say things to me. Perhaps I see it all to be very different when I come to really see what you mean by what you are always saying to me." "You is very sweet and good to me always, Jeff Campbell," said Melanctha. "'Deed I certainly am not good to you, Melanctha. Don't I bother you all the time with my talking, but I really do like you a whole lot, Melanctha."

"And I like you, Jeff Campbell, and you certainly are mother, and father, and brother, and sister, and child and everything, always to me. I can't say much about how good you been to me, Jeff Campbell, I never knew any man who was good and didn't do things ugly, before I met you to take care of me, Jeff Campbell. Good-by, Jeff, come see me to-morrow, when you get through with your working." "Sure Melanctha, you know that already," said Jeff Campbell, and then he went away and left her.

These months had been an uncertain time for Jeff Campbell. He never knew how much he really knew about Melanctha. He saw her now for long times and very often. He was beginning always more and more to like her. But he did not seem to himself to know very much about her. He was beginning to feel he could almost trust the goodness in her. But then, always, really, he was not very sure about her. Melanctha always had ways that made him feel uncertain with her, and yet he was so near, in his feeling for her. He now never thought about all this in real words any more. He was always letting it fight itself out in him. He was now never taking any part in this fighting that was always going on inside him.

Jeff always loved now to be with Melanctha and yet he always hated to go to her. Somehow he was always afraid when he was to go to her, and yet he had made himself very certain that here he would not be a coward. He never felt any of this being afraid, when he was



with her. Then they always were very true, and near to one another. But always when he was going to her, Jeff would like anything that could happen that would keep him a little longer from her.

It was a very uncertain time, all these months, for Jeff Campbell. He did not know very well what it was that he really wanted. He was very certain that he did not know very well what it was that Melanctha wanted. Jeff Campbell had always all his life loved to be with people, and he had loved all his life always to be thinking, but he was still only a great boy, was Jeff Campbell, and he had never before had any of this funny kind of feeling. Now, this evening, when he was free to go and see Melanctha, he talked to anybody he could find who would detain him, and so it was very late when at last he came to the house where Melanctha was waiting to receive him.

Jeff came in to where Melanctha was waiting for him, and he took off his hat and heavy coat, and then drew up a chair and sat down by the fire. It was very cold that night, and Jeff sat there, and rubbed his hands and tried to warm them. He had only said “How do you do” to Melanctha, he had not yet begun to talk to her. Melanctha sat there, by the fire, very quiet. The heat gave a pretty pink glow to her pale yellow and attractive face. Melanctha sat in a low chair, her hands, with their long, fluttering fingers, always ready to show her strong feeling, were lying quiet in her lap. Melanctha was very tired with her waiting for Jeff Campbell. She sat there very quiet and just watching. Jeff was a robust, dark, healthy, cheery negro. His hands were firm and kindly and unimpassioned. He touched women always with his big hands, like a brother. He always had a warm broad glow, like southern sunshine. He never had anything mysterious in him. He was open, he was pleasant, he was cheery, and always he wanted, as Melanctha once had wanted, always now he too wanted really to understand.

Jeff sat there this evening in his chair and was silent a long time, warming himself with the pleasant fire. He did not look at Melanctha who was watching. He sat there and just looked into the fire. At first his dark, open face was smiling, and he was rubbing the back of his black-

brown hand over his mouth to help him in his smiling. Then he was thinking, and he frowned and rubbed his head hard, to help him in his thinking. Then he smiled again, but now his smiling was not very pleasant. His smile was now wavering on the edge of scorning. His smile changed more and more, and then he had a look as if he were deeply down, all disgusted. Now his face was darker, and he was bitter in his smiling, and he began, without looking from the fire, to talk to Melanctha, who was now very tense with her watching.

“Melanctha Herbert”, began Jeff Campbell, “I certainly after all this time I know you, I certainly do know little, real about you. You see, Melanctha, it’s like this way with me”; Jeff was frowning, with his thinking and looking very hard into the fire, “You see it’s just this way, with me now, Melanctha. Sometimes you seem like one kind of a girl to me, and sometimes you are like a girl that is all different to me, and the two kinds of girls is certainly very different to each other, and I can’t see any way they seem to have much to do, to be together in you. They certainly don’t seem to be made much like as if they could have anything really to do with each other. Sometimes you are a girl to me I certainly never would be trusting, and you got a laugh then so hard, it just rattles, and you got ways so bad, I can’t believe you mean them hardly, and yet all that I just been saying is certainly you one way I often see you, and it’s what your mother and Jane Harden always found you, and it’s what makes me hate so, to come near you. And then certainly sometimes, Melanctha, you certainly is all a different creature, and sometimes then there comes out in you what is certainly a thing, like a real beauty. I certainly, Melanctha, never can tell just how it is that it comes so lovely. Seems to me when it comes it’s got a real sweetness, that is more wonderful than a pure flower, and a gentleness, that is more tender than the sunshine, and a kindness, that makes one feel like summer, and then a way to know, that makes everything all over, and all that, and it does certainly seem to be real for the little while it’s lasting, for the little while that I can surely see it, and it gives me to feel like I certainly had got real religion. And then when I got rich with such a feeling,



comes all that other girl, and then that seems more likely that that is really you what's honest, and then I certainly do get awful afraid to come to you, and I certainly never do feel I could be very trusting with you. And then I certainly don't know anything at all about you, and I certainly don't know which is a real Melanctha Herbert, and I certainly don't feel no longer, I ever want to talk to you. Tell me honest, Melanctha, which is the way that is you really, when you are alone, and real, and all honest. Tell me, Melanctha, for I certainly do want to know it."

Melanctha did not make him any answer, and Jeff, without looking at her, after a little while, went on with his talking. "And then, Melanctha, sometimes you certainly do seem sort of cruel, and not to care about people being hurt or in trouble, something so hard about you it makes me sometimes real nervous, sometimes somehow like you always, like your being, with 'Mis' Herbert. You sure did do everything that any woman could, Melanctha, I certainly never did see anybody do things any better, and yet, I don't know how to say just what I mean, Melanctha, but there was something awful hard about your feeling, so different from the way I'm always used to see good people feeling, and so it was the way Jane Harden and 'Mis' Herbert talked when they felt strong to talk about you, and yet, Melanctha, somehow I feel so really near to you, and you certainly have got an awful wonderful, strong kind of sweetness. I certainly would like to know for sure, Melanctha, whether I got really anything to be afraid for. I certainly did think once, Melanctha, I knew something about all kinds of women. I certainly know now really, how I don't know anything sure at all about you, Melanctha, though I been with you so long, and so many times for whole hours with you, and I like so awful much to be with you, and I can always say anything I am thinking to you. I certainly do awful wish, Melanctha, I really was more understanding. I certainly do that same, Melanctha."

Jeff stopped now and looked harder than before into the fire. His face changed from his thinking back into that look that was so like as if he was all through and through him, disgusted with what he had been thinking. He sat there a long time, very quiet, and then slowly, somehow,

it came strongly to him that Melanctha Herbert, there beside him, was trembling and feeling it all to be very bitter. "Why, Melanctha," cried Jeff Campbell, and he got up and put his arm around her like a brother. "I stood it just so long as I could bear it, Jeff," sobbed Melanctha, and then she gave herself away, to her misery, "I was awful ready, Jeff, to let you say anything you liked that gave you any pleasure. You could say all about me what you wanted, Jeff, and I would try to stand it, so as you would be sure to be liking it, Jeff, but you was too cruel to me. When you do that kind of seeing how much you can make a woman suffer, you ought to give her a little rest, once sometimes, Jeff. They can't any of us stand it so for always, Jeff. I certainly did stand it just as long as I could, so you would like it, but I,—oh Jeff, you went on too long to-night Jeff. I couldn't stand it not a minute longer the way you was doing of it, Jeff. When you want to be seeing how the way a woman is really made of, Jeff, you shouldn't never be so cruel, never to be thinking how much she can stand, the strong way you always do it, Jeff." "Why, Melanctha," cried Jeff Campbell, in his horror, and then he was very tender to her, and like a good, strong, gentle brother in his soothing of her, "Why Melanctha dear, I certainly don't now see what it is you mean by what you was just saying to me. Why Melanctha, you poor little girl, you certainly never did believe I ever knew I was giving you real suffering. Why, Melanctha, how could you ever like me if you thought I ever could be so like a red Indian?" "I didn't just know, Jeff," and Melanctha nestled to him, "I certainly never did know just what it was you wanted to be doing with me, but I certainly wanted you should do anything you liked, you wanted, to make me more understanding for you. I tried awful hard to stand it, Jeff, so as you could do anything you wanted with me." "Good Lord and Jesus Christ, Melanctha!" cried Jeff Campbell. "I certainly never can know anything about you real, Melanctha, you poor little girl," and Jeff drew her closer to him, "But I certainly do admire and trust you a whole lot now, Melanctha. I certainly do, for I certainly never did think I was hurting you at all, Melanctha, by the things I always been saying to you. Melanctha, you poor little, sweet, trembling baby now, be good, Melanctha.



I certainly can't ever tell you how awful sorry I am to hurt you so, Melanctha. I do anything I can to show you how I never did mean to hurt you, Melanctha." "I know, I know," murmured Melanctha, clinging to him. "I know you are a good man, Jeff. I always know that, no matter how much you can hurt me." "I sure don't see how you can think so, Melanctha, if you certainly did think I was trying so hard just to hurt you." "Hush, you are only a great big boy, Jeff Campbell, and you don't know nothing yet about real hurting," said Melanctha, smiling up through her crying, at him. "You see, Jeff, I never knew anybody I could know real well and yet keep on always respecting, till I came to know you real well, Jeff." "I sure don't understand that very well, Melanctha. I ain't a bit better than just lots of others of the colored people. You certainly have been unlucky with the kind you met before me, that's all, Melanctha. I certainly ain't very good, Melanctha." "Hush, Jeff, you don't know nothing at all about what you are," said Melanctha. "Perhaps you are right, Melanctha. I don't say ever any more, you ain't right, when you say things to me, Melanctha," and Jefferson sighed, and then he smiled, and then they were quiet a long time together, and then after some more kindness, it was late, and then Jeff left her.

Jeff Campbell, all these months, had never told his good mother anything about Melanctha Herbert.

Somehow he always kept his seeing her so much now, to himself. Melanctha too had never had any of her other friends meet him. They always acted together, these two, as if their being so much together was a secret, but really there was no one who would have made it any harder for them. Jeff Campbell did not really know how it had happened that they were so secret. He did not know if it was what Melanctha wanted. Jeff had never spoken to her at all about it. It just seemed as if it were well understood between them that nobody should know that they were so much together. It was as if it were agreed between them, that they should be alone by themselves always, and so they would work out together what they meant by what they were always saying to each other.

Jefferson often spoke to Melanctha about his good

mother. He never said anything about whether Melanctha would want to meet her. Jefferson never quite understood why all this had happened so, in secret. He never really knew what it was that Melanctha really wanted. In all these ways he just, by his nature, did, what he sort of felt Melanctha wanted. And so they continued to be alone and much together, and now it had come to be the spring time, and now they had all out-doors to wander.

They had many days now when they were very happy.

Jeff every day found that he really liked Melanctha better. Now surely he was beginning to have real, deep feeling in him. And still he loved to talk himself out to Melanctha, and he loved to tell her how good it all was to him, and how he always loved to be with her, and to tell her always all about it. One day, now Jeff arranged, that Sunday they would go out and have a happy, long day in the bright fields, and they would be all day just alone together. The day before, Jeff was called in to see Jane Harden.

Jane Harden was very sick almost all day and Jeff Campbell did everything he could to make her better. After a while Jane became more easy and then she began to talk to Jeff about Melanctha. Jane did not know how much Jeff was now seeing of Melanctha. Jane these days never saw Melanctha. Jane began to talk of the time when she first knew Melanctha. Jane began to tell how in these days Melanctha had very little understanding. She was young then and she had a good mind. Jane Harden never would say Melanctha never had a good mind, but in those days Melanctha certainly had not been very understanding. Jane began to explain to Jeff Campbell how in every way, she Jane, had taught Melanctha. Jane then began to explain how eager Melanctha always had been for all that kind of learning. Jane Harden began to tell how they had wandered. Jane began to tell how Melanctha once had loved her, Jane Harden. Jane began to tell Jeff of all the bad ways Melanctha had used with her. Jane began to tell all she knew of the way Melanctha had gone on, after she had left her. Jane began to tell all about the different men, white ones and blacks, Melanctha never was particular about things like that,



Jane Harden said in passing, not that Melanctha was a bad one, and she had a good mind, Jane Harden never would say that she hadn't, but Melanctha always liked to use all the understanding ways that Jane had taught her, and so she wanted to know everything, always, that they knew how to teach her.

Jane was beginning to make Jeff Campbell see much clearer. Jane Harden did not know what it was that she was really doing with all this talking. Jane did not know what Jeff was feeling. Jane was always honest when she was talking, and now it just happened she had started talking about her old times with Melanctha Herbert. Jeff understood very well that it was all true what Jane was saying. Jeff Campbell was beginning now to see very clearly. He was beginning to feel very sick inside him. He knew now many things Melanctha had not yet taught him. He felt very sick and his heart was very heavy, and Melanctha certainly did seem very ugly to him. Jeff was at last beginning to know what it was to have deep feeling. He took care a little longer of Jane Harden, and then he went to his other patients, and then he went home to his room, and he sat down and at last he had stopped thinking. He was very sick and his heart was very heavy in him. He was very tired and all the world was very dreary to him, and he knew very well now at last, he was really feeling. He knew it now from the way it hurt him. He knew very well that now at last he was beginning to really have understanding. The next day he had arranged to spend, long and happy, all alone in the spring fields with Melanctha, wandering. He wrote her a note and said he could not go, he had a sick patient and would have to stay home with him. For three days after, he made no sign to Melanctha. He was very sick all these days, and his heart was very heavy in him, and he knew very well that now at last he had learned what it was to have deep feeling.

At last one day he got a letter from Melanctha. "I certainly don't rightly understand what you are doing now to me Jeff Campbell," wrote Melanctha Herbert. "I certainly don't rightly understand Jeff Campbell why you ain't all these days been near me, but I certainly do suppose it's just another one of the queer kind of ways

you have to be good, and repenting of yourself all of a sudden. I certainly don't say to you Jeff Campbell I admire very much the way you take to be good Jeff Campbell. I am sorry Dr. Campbell, but I certainly am afraid I can't stand it no more from you the way you have been just acting. I certainly can't stand it any more the way you act when you have been as if you thought I was always good enough for anybody to have with them, and then you act as if I was a bad one and you always just despise me. I certainly am afraid Dr. Campbell I can't stand it any more like that. I certainly can't stand it any more the way you are always changing. I certainly am afraid Dr. Campbell you ain't man enough to deserve to have anybody care so much to be always with you. I certainly am awful afraid Dr. Campbell I don't ever any more want to really see you. Good-by Dr. Campbell I wish you always to be real happy."

Jeff Campbell sat in his room, very quiet, a long time, after he got through reading this letter. He sat very still and first he was very angry. As if he, too, did not know very badly what it was to suffer keenly. As if he had not been very strong to stay with Melanctha when he never knew what it was that she really wanted. He knew he was very right to be angry, he knew he really had not been a coward. He knew Melanctha had done many things it was very hard for him to forgive her. He knew very well he had done his best to be kind, and to trust her, and to be loyal to her, and now;—and then Jeff suddenly remembered how one night Melanctha had been so strong to suffer, and he felt come back to him the sweetness in her, and then Jeff knew that really, he always forgave her, and that really, it all was that he was so sorry he had hurt her, and he wanted to go straight away and be a comfort to her. Jeff knew very well, that what Jane Harden had told him about Melanctha and her bad ways, had been a true story, and yet he wanted very badly to be with Melanctha. Perhaps she could teach him to really understand it better. Perhaps she could teach him how it could be all true, and yet how he could be right to believe in her and to trust her.

Jeff sat down and began his answer to her. "Dear Melanctha," Jeff wrote to her. "I certainly don't think



you got it all just right in the letter, I just been reading, that you just wrote me. I certainly don't think you are just fair or very understanding to all I have to suffer to keep straight on to really always to believe in you and trust you. I certainly don't think you always are fair to remember right how hard it is for a man, who thinks like I was always thinking, not to think you do things very bad very often. I certainly don't think, Melanctha, I ain't right when I was so angry when I got your letter to me. I know very well, Melanctha, that with you, I never have been a coward. I find it very hard, and I never said it any different, it is hard to me to be understanding, and to know really what it is you wanted, and what it is you are meaning by what you are always saying to me. I don't say ever, it ain't very hard for you to be standing that I ain't very quick to be following whichever way that you are always leading. You know very well, Melanctha, it hurts me very bad and way inside me when I have to hurt you, but I always got to be real honest with you. There ain't no other way for me to be, with you, and I know very well it hurts me too, a whole lot, when I can't follow so quick as you would have me. I don't like to be a coward to you, Melanctha, and I don't like to say what I ain't meaning to you. And if you don't want me to do things honest, Melanctha, why I can't ever talk to you, and you are right when you say, you never again want to see me, but if you got any real sense of what I always been feeling with you, and if you got any right sense, Melanctha, of how hard I been trying to think and to feel right for you, I will be very glad to come and see you, and to begin again with you. I don't say anything now, Melanctha, about how bad I been this week, since I saw you, Melanctha. It don't ever do any good to talk such things over. All I know is I do my best, Melanctha, to you, and I don't say, no, never, I can do any different than just to be honest and come as fast as I think it's right for me to be going in the ways you teach me to be really understanding. So don't talk any more foolishness, Melanctha, about my always changing. I don't change, never, and I got to do what I think is right and honest to me, and I never told you any different, and you always knew it very well that I always would do just so. If you like me to come and see you to-morrow, and go out with

you, I will be very glad to, Melanctha. Let me know right away, what it is you want me to be doing for you, Melanctha.

Very truly yours, Jefferson Campbell

"Please come to me, Jeff." Melanctha wrote back for her answer. Jeff went very slowly to Melanctha, glad as he was, still to be going to her. Melanctha came, very quick, to meet him, when she saw him from where she had been watching for him. They went into the house together. They were very glad to be together. They were very good to one another.

"I certainly did think, Melanctha, this time almost really, you never did want me to come to you at all any more to see you," said Jeff Campbell to her, when they had begun again with their talking to each other. "You certainly did make me think, perhaps really this time, Melanctha, it was all over, my being with you ever, and I was very mad, and very sorry, too, Melanctha."

"Well you certainly was very bad to me, Jeff Campbell," said Melanctha, fondly.

"I certainly never do say any more you ain't always right, Melanctha," Jeff answered and he was very ready now with cheerful laughing, "I certainly never do say that any more, Melanctha, if I know it, but still, really, Melanctha, honest, I think perhaps I wasn't real bad to you any more than you just needed from me."

Jeff held Melanctha in his arms and kissed her. He sighed then and was very silent with her. "Well, Melanctha," he said at last, with some more laughing, "well, Melanctha, any way you can't say ever it ain't, if we are ever friends good and really, you can't say, no, never, but that we certainly have worked right hard to get both of us together for it, so we shall sure deserve it then, if we can ever really get it." "We certainly have worked real hard, Jeff, I can't say that ain't all right the way you say it," said Melanctha. "I certainly never can deny it, Jeff, when I feel so worn with all the trouble you been making for me, you bad boy, Jeff," and then Melanctha smiled and then she sighed, and then she was very silent with him.



At last Jeff was to go away. They stood there on the steps for a long time trying to say good-by to each other. At last Jeff made himself really say it. At last he made himself, that he went down the steps and went away.

On the next Sunday they arranged, they were to have the long happy day of wandering that they had lost last time by Jane Harden's talking. Not that Melanctha Herbert had heard yet of Jane Harden's talking.

Jeff saw Melanctha every day now. Jeff was a little uncertain all this time inside him, for he had never yet told to Melanctha what it was that had so nearly made him really want to leave her. Jeff knew that for him, it was not right he should not tell her. He knew they could only have real peace between them when he had been honest, and had really told her. On this long Sunday Jeff was certain that he would really tell her.

They were very happy all that day in their wandering.

They had taken things along to eat together. They sat in the bright fields and they were happy, they wandered in the woods and they were happy. Jeff always loved in this way to wander. Jeff always loved to watch everything as it was growing, and he loved all the colors in the trees and on the ground, and the little, new, bright colored bugs he found in the moist ground and in the grass he loved to lie on and in which he was always so busy searching. Jeff loved everything that moved and that was still, and that had color, and beauty, and real being.

Jeff loved very much this day while they were wandering. He almost forgot that he had any trouble with him still inside him. Jeff loved to be there with Melanctha Herbert. She was always so sympathetic to him for the way she listened to everything he found and told her, the way she felt his joy in all this being, the way she never said she wanted anything different from the way they had it. It was certainly a busy and a happy day, this their first long day of really wandering.

Later they were tired, and Melanctha sat down on the ground, and Jeff threw himself his full length beside her. Jeff lay there, very quiet, and then he pressed her hand and kissed it and murmured to her. "You certainly are

very good to me, Melanctha." Melanctha felt it very deep and did not answer. Jeff lay there a long time, looking up above him. He was counting all the little leaves he saw above him. He was following all the little clouds with his eyes as they sailed past him. He watched all the birds that flew high beyond him, and all the time Jeff knew he must tell to Melanctha what it was he knew now, that which Jane Harden, just a week ago, had told him. He knew very well that for him it was certain that he had to say it. It was hard, but for Jeff Campbell the only way to lose it was to say it, the only way to know Melanctha really, was to tell her all the struggle he had made to know her, to tell her so she could help him to understand his trouble better, to help him so that never again he could have any way to doubt her.

Jeff lay there a long time, very quiet, always looking up above him, and yet feeling very close now to Melanctha. At last he turned a little toward her, took her hands closer in his to make him feel it stronger, and then very slowly, for the words came very hard for him, slowly he began his talk to her.

"Melanctha," began Jeff, very slowly, "Melanctha, it ain't right I shouldn't tell you why I went away last week and almost never got the chance again to see you. Jane Harden was sick, and I went in to take care of her. She began to tell everything she ever knew about you. She didn't know how well now I know you. I didn't tell her not to go on talking. I listened while she told me everything about you. I certainly found it very hard with what she told me. I know she was talking truth in everything she said about you. I knew you had been free in your ways, Melanctha, I knew you liked to get excitement the way I always hate to see the colored people take it. I didn't know, till I heard Jane Harden say it, you had done things so bad, Melanctha. When Jane Harden told me, I got very sick, Melanctha. I couldn't bear hardly, to think, perhaps I was just another like them to you, Melanctha. I was wrong not to trust you perhaps, Melanctha, but it did make things very ugly to me. I try to be honest to you, Melanctha, the way you say you really want it from me."



Melantha drew her hands from Jeff Campbell. She sat there, and there was deep scorn in her anger. “If you wasn’t all through just selfish and nothing else, Jeff Campbell, you would take care you wouldn’t have to tell me things like this, Jeff Campbell.”

Jeff was silent a little, and he waited before he gave his answer. It was not the power of Melantha’s words that held him, for, for them, he had his answer, it was the power of the mood that filled Melantha, and for that he had no answer. At last he broke through this awe, with his slow fighting resolution, and he began to give his answer.

“I don’t say ever, Melantha,” he began, “it wouldn’t have been more right for me to stop Jane Harden in her talking and to come to you to have you tell me what you were when I never knew you. I don’t say it, no never to you, that that would not have been the right way for me to do, Melantha. But I certainly am without any kind of doubting, I certainly do know for sure, I had a good right to know about what you were and your ways and your trying to use your understanding, every kind of way you could to get your learning. I certainly did have a right to know things like that about you, Melantha. I don’t say it ever, Melantha, and I say it very often, I don’t say ever I shouldn’t have stopped Jane Harden in her talking and come to you and asked you yourself to tell me all about it, but I guess I wanted to keep myself from how much it would hurt me more, to have you yourself say it to me. Perhaps it was I wanted to keep you from having it hurt you so much more, having you to have to tell it to me. I don’t know, I don’t say it was to help you from being hurt most, or to help me. Perhaps I was a coward to let Jane Harden tell me ‘stead of coming straight to you, to have you tell me, but I certainly am sure, Melantha, I certainly had a right to know such things about you. I don’t say it ever, ever, Melantha, I hadn’t the just right to know those things about you.”

Melantha laughed her harsh laugh. “You needn’t have been under no kind of worry, Jeff Campbell, about whether you should have asked me. You could have asked, it wouldn’t have hurt nothing. I certainly never

would have told you nothing.” “I am not so sure of that, Melantha,” said Jeff Campbell. “I certainly do think you would have told me. I certainly do think I could make you feel it right to tell me. I certainly do think all I did wrong was to let Jane Harden tell me. I certainly do know I never did wrong, to learn what she told me. I certainly know very well, Melantha, if I had come here to you, you would have told it all to me, Melantha.”

He was silent, and this struggle lay there, strong, between them. It was a struggle, sure to be going on always between them. It was a struggle that was as sure always to be going on between them, as their minds and hearts always were to have different ways of working.

At last Melantha took his hand, leaned over him and kissed him. “I sure am very fond of you, Jeff Campbell,” Melantha whispered to him.

Now for a little time there was not any kind of trouble between Jeff Campbell and Melantha Herbert. They were always together now for long times, and very often. They got much joy now, both of them, from being all the time together.

It was summer now, and they had warm sunshine to wander. It was summer now, and Jeff Campbell had more time to wander, for colored people never get sick so much in the summer. It was summer now, and there was a lovely silence everywhere, and all the noises, too, that they heard around them were lovely ones, and added to the joy, in these warm days, they loved so much to be together.

They talked some to each other in these days, did Jeff Campbell and Melantha Herbert, but always in these days their talking more and more was like it always is with real lovers. Jeff did not talk so much now about what he before always had been thinking. Sometimes Jeff would be, as if he was just waking from himself to be with Melantha, and then he would find he had been really all the long time with her, and he had really never needed to be doing any thinking.

It was sometimes pure joy Jeff would be talking to Melantha, in these warm days he loved so much to



wander with her. Sometimes Jeff would lose all himself in a strong feeling. Very often now, and always with more joy in his feeling, he would find himself, he did not know how or what it was he had been thinking. And Melanctha always loved very well to make him feel it. She always now laughed a little at him, and went back a little in him to his before, always thinking, and she teased him with his always now being so good with her in his feeling, and then she would so well and freely, and with her pure, strong ways of reaching, she would give him all the love she knew now very well, how much he always wanted to be sure he really had it.

And Jeff took it straight now, and he loved it, and he felt, strong, the joy of all this being, and it swelled out full inside him, and he poured it all out back to her in freedom, in tender kindness, and in joy, and in gentle brother fondling. And Melanctha loved him for it always, her Jeff Campbell now, who never did things ugly, for her, like all the men she always knew before always had been doing to her. And they loved it always, more and more, together, with this new feeling they had now, in these long summer days so warm; they, always together now, just these two so dear, more and more to each other always, and the summer evenings when they wandered, and the noises in the full streets, and the music of the organs, and the dancing, and the warm smell of the people, and of dogs and of the horses, and all the joy of the strong, sweet pungent, dirty, moist, warm negro southern summer.

Every day now, Jeff seemed to be coming nearer, to be really loving. Every day now, Melanctha poured it all out to him, with more freedom. Every day now, they seemed to be having more and more, both together, of this strong, right feeling. More and more every day now they seemed to know more really, what it was each other one was always feeling. More and more now every day Jeff found in himself, he felt more trusting. More and more every day now, he did not think anything in words about what he was always doing. Every day now more and more Melanctha would let out to Jeff her real, strong feeling.

One day there had been much joy between them, more than they ever yet had had with their new feeling. All the day they had lost themselves in warm wandering. Now they were lying there and resting, with a green, bright, light-flecked world around them.

What was it that now really happened to them? What was it that Melanctha did, that made everything get all ugly for them? What was it that Melanctha felt then, that made Jeff remember all the feeling he had had in him when Jane Harden told him how Melanctha had learned to be so very understanding? Jeff did not know how it was that it had happened to him. It was all green, and warm, and very lovely to him, and now Melanctha somehow had made it all so ugly for him.

What was it Melanctha was now doing with him? What was it he used to be thinking was the right way for him and all the colored people to be always trying to make it right, the way they should be always living? Why was Melanctha Herbert now all so ugly for him?

Melanctha Herbert somehow had made him feel deeply just then, what very more it was that she wanted from him. Jeff Campbell now felt in him what everybody always had needed to make them really understanding, to him. Jeff felt a strong disgust inside him; not for Melanctha herself, to him, not for himself really, in him, not for what it was that everybody wanted, in them; he only had disgust because he never could know really in him, what it was he wanted, to be really right in understanding, for him, he only had disgust because he never could know really what it was really right to him to be always doing, in the things he had before believed in, the things he before had believed in for himself and for all the colored people, the living regular, and the never wanting to be always having new things, just to keep on, always being in excitements. All the old thinking now came up very strong inside him. He sort of turned away then, and threw Melanctha from him.

Jeff never, even now, knew what it was that moved him. He never, even now, was ever sure, he really knew what Melanctha was, when she was real herself, and honest. He thought he knew, and then there came to him



some moment, just like this one, when she really woke him up to be strong in him. Then he really knew he could know nothing. He knew then, he never could know what it was she really wanted with him. He knew then he never could know really what it was he felt inside him. It was all so mixed up inside him. All he knew was he wanted very badly Melanctha should be there beside him, and he wanted very badly, too, always to throw her from him. What was it really that Melanctha wanted with him? What was it really, he, Jeff Campbell, wanted she should give him? "I certainly did think now," Jeff Campbell groaned inside him, "I certainly did think now I really was knowing all right, what I wanted. I certainly did really think now I was knowing how to be trusting with Melanctha. I certainly did think it was like that now with me sure, after all I've been through all this time with her. And now I certainly do know I don't know anything that's very real about her. Oh the good Lord help and keep me!" and Jeff groaned hard inside him, and he buried his face deep in the green grass underneath him, and Melanctha Herbert was very silent there beside him.

Then Jeff turned to look and see her. She was lying very still there by him, and the bitter water on her face was biting. Jeff was so very sorry then, all over and inside him, the way he always was when Melanctha had been deep hurt by him. "I didn't mean to be so bad again to you, Melanctha, dear one," and he was very tender to her. "I certainly didn't never mean to go to be so bad to you, Melanctha, darling. I certainly don't know, Melanctha, darling, what it is makes me act so to you sometimes, when I certainly ain't meaning anything like I want to hurt you. I certainly don't mean to be so bad, Melanctha, only it comes so quick on me before I know what I am acting to you. I certainly am all sorry, hard, to be so bad to you, Melanctha, darling." "I suppose, Jeff," said Melanctha, very low and bitter, "I suppose you are always thinking, Jeff, somebody had ought to be ashamed with us two together, and you certainly do think you don't see any way to it, Jeff, for me to be feeling that way ever, so you certainly don't see any way to it, only to do it just so often for me. That certainly is the way

always with you, Jeff Campbell, if I understand you right the way you are always acting to me. That certainly is right the way I am saying it to you now, Jeff Campbell. You certainly didn't anyway trust me now no more, did you, when you just acted so bad to me. I certainly am right the way I say it Jeff now to you. I certainly am right when I ask you for it now, to tell me what I ask you, about not trusting me more then again, Jeff, just like you never really knew me. You certainly never did trust me just then, Jeff, you hear me?" "Yes, Melanctha," Jeff answered slowly. Melanctha paused. "I guess I certainly never can forgive you this time, Jeff Campbell," she said firmly. Jeff paused too, and thought a little. "I certainly am afraid you never can no more now again, Melanctha," he said sadly.

They lay there very quiet now a long time, each one thinking very hard on their own trouble. At last Jeff began again to tell Melanctha what it was he was always thinking with her. "I certainly do know, Melanctha, you certainly now don't want any more to be hearing me just talking, but you see, Melanctha, really, it's just like this way always with me. You see, Melanctha, its like this way now all the time with me. You remember, Melanctha, what I was once telling to you, when I didn't know you very long together, about how I certainly never did know more than just two kinds of ways of living, one way the way it is good to be in families and the other kind of way, like animals are all the time just with each other, and how I didn't ever like that last kind of way much for any of the colored people. You see Melanctha, it's like this way with me. I got a new feeling now, you been teaching to me, just like I told you once, just like a new religion to me, and I see perhaps what really loving is like, like really having everything together, new things, little pieces all different, like I always before been thinking was bad to be having, all go together like, to make one good big feeling. You see, Melanctha, it's certainly like that you make me been seeing, like I never know before any way there was of all kinds of loving to come together to make one way really truly lovely. I see that now, sometimes, the way you certainly been teaching me, Melanctha, really, and then I love you those



times, Melanctha, like a real religion, and then it comes over me all sudden, I don't know anything real about you Melanctha, dear one, and then it comes over me sudden, perhaps I certainly am wrong now, thinking all this way so lovely, and not thinking now any more the old way I always before was always thinking, about what was the right way for me, to live regular and all the colored people, and then I think, perhaps, Melanctha you are really just a bad one, and I think, perhaps I certainly am doing it so because I just am too anxious to be just having all the time excitements, like I don't ever like really to be doing when I know it, and then I always get so bad to you, Melanctha, and I can't help it with myself then, never, for I want to be always right really in the ways, I have to do them. I certainly do very badly want to be right, Melanctha, the only way I know is right Melanctha really, and I don't know any way, Melanctha, to find out really, whether my old way, the way I always used to be thinking, or the new way, you make so like a real religion to me sometimes, Melanctha, which way certainly is the real right way for me to be always thinking, and then I certainly am awful good and sorry, Melanctha, I always give you so much trouble, hurting you with the bad ways I am acting. Can't you help me to any way, to make it all straight for me, Melanctha, so I know right and real what it is I should be acting. You see, Melanctha, I don't want always to be a coward with you, if I only could know certain what was the right way for me to be acting. I certainly am real sure, Melanctha, that would be the way I would be acting, if I only knew it sure for certain now, Melanctha. Can't you help me any way to find out real and true, Melanctha, dear one. I certainly do badly want to know always, the way I should be acting."

"No, Jeff, dear, I certainly can't help you much in that kind of trouble you are always having. All I can do now, Jeff, is to just keep certainly with my believing you are good always, Jeff, and though you certainly do hurt me bad, I always got strong faith in you, Jeff, more in you certainly, than you seem to be having in your acting to me, always so bad, Jeff."

"You certainly are very good to me, Melanctha, dear one," Jeff said, after a long, tender silence. "You

certainly are very good to me, Melanctha, darling, and me so bad to you always, in my acting. Do you love me good, and right, Melanctha, always?" "Always and always, you be sure of that now you have me. Oh you Jeff, you always be so stupid." "I certainly never can say now you ain't right, when you say that to me so, Melanctha," Jeff answered. "Oh, Jeff dear, I love you always, you know that now, all right, for certain. If you don't know it right now, Jeff, really, I prove it to you now, for good and always." And they lay there a long time in their loving, and then Jeff began again with his happy free enjoying.

"I sure am a good boy to be learning all the time the right way you are teaching me, Melanctha, darling," began Jeff Campbell, laughing. "You can't say no, never, I ain't a good scholar for you to be teaching now, Melanctha, and I am always so ready to come to you every day, and never playing hooky ever from you. You can't say ever, Melanctha, now can you, I ain't a real good boy to be always studying to be learning to be real bright, just like my teacher. You can't say ever to me, I ain't a good boy to you now, Melanctha." "Not near so good, Jeff Campbell, as such a good, patient kind of teacher, like me, who never teaches any ways it ain't good her scholars should be knowing, ought to be really having, Jeff, you hear me? I certainly don't think I am right for you, to be forgiving always, when you are so bad, and I so patient, with all this hard teaching always." "But you do forgive me always, sure, Melanctha, always?" "Always and always, you be sure Jeff, and I certainly am afraid I never can stop with my forgiving, you always are going to be so bad to me, and I always going to have to be so good with my forgiving." "Oh! Oh!" cried Jeff Campbell, laughing, "I ain't going to be so bad for always, sure I ain't, Melanctha, my own darling. And sure you do forgive me really, and sure you love me true and really, sure, Melanctha?" "Sure, sure, Jeff, boy, sure now and always, sure now you believe me, sure you do, Jeff, always." "I sure hope I does, with all my heart, Melanctha, darling." "I sure do that same, Jeff, dear boy, now you really know what it is to be loving, and I prove it to you now so, Jeff, you never can



be forgetting. You see now, Jeff, good and certain, what I always before been saying to you, Jeff, now.” “Yes, Melanctha, darling,” murmured Jeff, and he was very happy in it, and so the two of them now in the warm air of the sultry, southern, negro sunshine, lay there for a long time just resting. And now for a real long time there was no open trouble any more between Jeff Campbell and Melanctha Herbert. Then it came that Jeff knew he could not say out any more, what it was he wanted, he could not say out any more, what it was, he wanted to know about, what Melanctha wanted.

Melanctha sometimes now, when she was tired with being all the time so much excited, when Jeff would talk a long time to her about what was right for them both to be always doing, would be, as if she gave way in her head, and lost herself in a bad feeling. Sometimes when they had been strong in their loving, and Jeff would have rise inside him some strange feeling, and Melanctha felt it in him as it would soon be coming, she would lose herself then in this bad feeling that made her head act as if she never knew what it was they were doing. And slowly now, Jeff soon always came to be feeling that his Melanctha would be hurt very much in her head in the ways he never liked to think of, if she would ever now again have to listen to his trouble, when he was telling about what it was he still was wanting to make things for himself really understanding.

Now Jeff began to have always a strong feeling that Melanctha could no longer stand it, with all her bad suffering, to let him fight out with himself what was right for him to be doing. Now he felt he must not, when she was there with him, keep on, with this kind of fighting that was always going on inside him. Jeff Campbell never knew yet, what he thought was the right way, for himself and for all the colored people to be living. Jeff was coming always each time closer to be really understanding, but now Melanctha was so bad in her suffering with him, that he knew she could not any longer have him with her while he was always showing that he never really yet was sure what it was, the right way, for them to be really loving.

Jeff saw now he had to go so fast, so that Melanctha never would have to wait any to get from him always all that she ever wanted. He never could be honest now, he never could be now, any more, trying to be really understanding, for always every moment now he felt it to be a strong thing in him, how very much it was Melanctha Herbert always suffered.

Jeff did not know very well these days, what it was, was

really happening to him. All he knew every now and then, when they were getting strong to get excited, the way they used to when he gave his feeling out so that he could be always honest, that Melanctha somehow never seemed to hear him, she just looked at him and looked as if her head hurt with him, and then Jeff had to keep himself from being honest, and he had to go so fast, and to do everything Melanctha ever wanted from him.

Jeff did not like it very well these days, in his true feeling. He knew now very well Melanctha was not strong enough inside her to stand any more of his slow way of doing. And yet now he knew he was not honest in his feeling. Now he always had to show more to Melanctha than he was ever feeling. Now she made him go so fast, and he knew it was not real with his feeling, and yet he could not make her suffer so any more because he always was so slow with his feeling.

It was very hard for Jeff Campbell to make all this way of doing, right, inside him. If Jeff Campbell could not be straight out, and real honest, he never could be very strong inside him. Now Melanctha, with her making him feel, always, how good she was and how very much she suffered in him, made him always go so fast then, he could not be strong then, to feel things out straight then inside him. Always now when he was with her, he was being more, than he could already yet, be feeling for her. Always now, with her, he had something inside him always holding in him, always now, with her, he was far ahead of his own feeling.

Jeff Campbell never knew very well these days what it was that was going on inside him. All he knew was,



he was uneasy now always to be with Melanctha. All he knew was, that he was always uneasy when he was with Melanctha, not the way he used to be from just not being very understanding, but now, because he never could be honest with her, because he was now always feeling her strong suffering, in her, because he knew now he was having a straight, good feeling with her, but she went so fast, and he was so slow to her; Jeff knew his right feeling never got a chance to show itself as strong, to her.

All this was always getting harder for Jeff Campbell. He was very proud to hold himself to be strong, was Jeff Campbell. He was very tender not to hurt Melanctha, when he knew she would be sure to feel it badly in her head a long time after, he hated that he could not now be honest with her, he wanted to stay away to work it out all alone, without her, he was afraid she would feel it to suffer, if he kept away now from her. He was uneasy always, with her, he was uneasy when he thought about her, he knew now he had a good, straight, strong feeling of right loving for her, and yet now he never could use it to be good and honest with her.

Jeff Campbell did not know, these days, anything he could do to make it better for her. He did not know anything he could do, to set himself really right in his acting and his thinking toward her. She pulled him so fast with her, and he did not dare to hurt her, and he could not come right, so fast, the way she always needed he should be doing it now, for her.

These days were not very joyful ones now any more, to Jeff Campbell, with Melanctha. He did not think it out to himself now, in words, about her. He did not know enough, what was his real trouble, with her.

Sometimes now and again with them, and with all this trouble for a little while well forgotten by him, Jeff, and Melanctha with him, would be very happy in a strong, sweet loving. Sometimes then, Jeff would find himself to be soaring very high in his true loving. Sometimes Jeff would find them, in his loving, his soul swelling out full inside him. Always Jeff felt now in himself, deep feeling.

Always now Jeff had to go so much faster than was real with his feeling. Yet always Jeff knew how he had a right, strong feeling. Always now when Jeff was wondering, it was Melanctha he was doubting, in the loving. Now he would often ask her, was she real now to him, in her loving. He would ask her often, feeling something queer about it all inside him, though yet he was never really strong in his doubting, and always Melanctha would answer to him, "Yes Jeff, sure, you know it, always," and always Jeff felt a doubt now, in her loving.

Always now Jeff felt in himself, deep loving. Always now he did not know really, if Melanctha was true in her loving.

All these days Jeff was uncertain in him, and he was uneasy about which way he should act so as not to be wrong and put them both into bad trouble. Always now he was, as if he must feel deep into Melanctha to see if it was real loving he would find she now had in her, and always he would stop himself, with her, for always he was afraid now that he might badly hurt her. Always now he liked it better when he was detained when he had to go and see her. Always now he never liked to go to be with her, although he never wanted really, not to be always with her. Always now he never felt really at ease with her, even when they were good friends together. Always now he felt, with her, he could not be really honest to her. And Jeff never could be happy with her when he could not feel strong to tell all his feeling to her. Always now every day he found it harder to make the time pass, with her, and not let his feeling come so that he would quarrel with her.

And so one evening, late, he was to go to her. He waited a little long, before he went to her. He was afraid, in himself, to-night, he would surely hurt her. He never wanted to go when he might quarrel with her. Melanctha sat there looking very angry, when he came in to her. Jeff took off his hat and coat and then sat down by the fire with her.

"If you come in much later to me just now, Jeff Campbell, I certainly never would have seen you no



more never to speak to you, 'thout your apologising real humble to me." "Apologising Melanctha," and Jeff laughed and was scornful to her, "Apologising, Melanctha, I ain't proud that kind of way, Melanctha, I don't mind apologising to you, Melanctha, all I mind, Melanctha is to be doing of things wrong, to you."

"That's easy, to say things that way, Jeff to me. But you never was very proud Jeff, to be courageous to me." "I don't know about that Melanctha. I got courage to say some things hard, when I mean them, to you." "Oh, yes, Jeff, I know all about that, Jeff, to me. But I mean real courage, to run around and not care nothing about what happens, and always to be game in any kind of trouble. That's what I mean by real courage, to me, Jeff, if you want to know it." "Oh, yes, Melanctha, I know all that kind of courage. I see plenty of it all the time with some kinds of colored men and with some girls like you Melanctha, and Jane Harden. I know all about how you are always making a fuss to be proud because you don't holler so much when you run in to where you ain't got any business to be, and so you get hurt, the way you ought to. And then, you kind of people are very brave then, sure, with all your kinds of suffering, but the way I see it, going round with all my patients, that kind of courage makes all kind of trouble, for them who ain't so noble with their courage, and then they got it, always to be bearing it, when the end comes, to be hurt the hardest. It's like running around and being game to spend all your money always, and then a man's wife and children are the ones do all the starving and they don't ever get a name for being brave, and they don't ever want to be doing all that suffering, and they got to stand it and say nothing. That's the way I see it a good deal now with all that kind of braveness in some of the colored people. They always make a lot of noise to show they are so brave not to holler, when they got so much suffering they always bring all on themselves, just by doing things they got no business to be doing. I don't say, never, Melanctha, they ain't got good courage not to holler, but I never did see much in looking for that kind of trouble just to show you ain't going to holler. No its all right being brave every day, just living regular and not having new ways all the

time just to get excitements, the way I hate to see it in all the colored people. No I don't see much, Melanctha, in being brave just to get it good, where you've got no business. I ain't ashamed Melanctha, right here to tell you, I ain't ashamed ever to say I ain't got no longing to be brave, just to go around and look for trouble." "Yes that's just like you always, Jeff, you never understand things right, the way you are always feeling in you. You ain't got no way to understand right, how it depends what way somebody goes to look for new things, the way it makes it right for them to get excited."

"No Melanctha, I certainly never do say I understand much anybody's got a right to think they won't have real bad trouble, if they go and look hard where they are certain sure to find it. No Melanctha, it certainly does sound very pretty all this talking about danger and being game and never hollering, and all that way of talking, but when two men are just fighting, the strong man mostly gets on top with doing good hard pounding, and the man that's getting all that pounding, he mostly never likes it so far as I have been able yet to see it, and I don't see much difference what kind of noble way they are made of when they ain't got any kind of business to get together there to be fighting. That certainly is the only way I ever see it happen right, Melanctha, whenever I happen to be anywhere I can be looking."

"That's because you never can see anything that ain't just so simple, Jeff, with everybody, the way you always think it. It do make all the difference the kind of way anybody is made to do things game Jeff Campbell."

"Maybe Melanctha, I certainly never say no you ain't right, Melanctha. I just been telling it to you all straight, Melanctha, the way I always see it. Perhaps if you run around where you ain't got any business, and you stand up very straight and say, I am so brave, nothing can ever hurt me, maybe nothing will ever hurt you then Melanctha. I never have seen it do so. I never can say truly any differently to you Melanctha, but I always am ready to be learning from you, Melanctha. And perhaps when somebody cuts into you real hard, with a brick he is throwing, perhaps you never will do any hollering then,



Melanctha. I certainly don't ever say no, Melanctha, to you, I only say that ain't the way yet I ever see it happen when I had a chance to be there looking."

They sat there together, quiet by the fire, and they did not seem to feel very loving.

"I certainly do wonder," Melanctha said dreamily, at last breaking into their long unloving silence. "I certainly do wonder why always it happens to me I care for anybody who ain't no ways good enough for me ever to be thinking to respect him."

Jeff looked at Melanctha. Jeff got up then and walked a little up and down the room, and then he came back, and his face was set and dark and he was very quiet to her.

"Oh dear, Jeff, sure, why you look so solemn now to me. Sure Jeff I never am meaning anything real by what I just been saying. What was I just been saying Jeff to you. I only certainly was just thinking how everything always was just happening to me."

Jeff Campbell sat very still and dark, and made no answer.

"Seems to me, Jeff you might be good to me a little tonight when my head hurts so, and I am so tired with all the hard work I have been doing, thinking, and I always got so many things to be a trouble to me, living like I do with nobody ever who can help me. Seems to me you might be good to me Jeff to-night, and not get angry, every little thing I am ever saying to you."

"I certainly would not get angry ever with you, Melanctha, just because you say things to me. But now I certainly been thinking you really mean what you have been just then saying to me." "But you say all the time to me Jeff, you ain't no ways good enough in your loving to me, you certainly say to me all the time you ain't no ways good or understanding to me." "That certainly is what I say to you always, just the way I feel it to you Melanctha always, and I got it right in me to say it, and I have got a right in me to be very strong and feel it, and to be always sure to believe it, but it ain't right for you Melanctha to

feel it. When you feel it so Melanctha, it does certainly make everything all wrong with our loving. It makes it so I certainly never can bear to have it."

They sat there then a long time by the fire, very silent, and not loving, and never looking to each other for it. Melanctha was moving and twitching herself and very nervous with it. Jeff was heavy and sullen and dark and very serious in it.

"Oh why can't you forget I said it to you Jeff now, and I certainly am so tired, and my head and all now with it."

Jeff stirred, "All right Melanctha, don't you go make yourself sick now in your head, feeling so bad with it," and Jeff made himself do it, and he was a patient doctor again now with Melanctha when he felt her really having her head hurt with it. "It's all right now Melanctha darling, sure it is now I tell you. You just lie down now a little, dear one, and I sit here by the fire and just read awhile and just watch with you so I will be here ready, if you need me to give you something to help you resting." And then Jeff was a good doctor to her, and very sweet and tender with her, and Melanctha loved him to be there to help her, and then Melanctha fell asleep a little, and Jeff waited there beside her until he saw she was really sleeping, and then he went back and sat down by the fire. And Jeff tried to begin again with his thinking, and he could not make it come clear to himself, with all his thinking, and he felt everything all thick and heavy and bad, now inside him, everything that he could not understand right, with all the hard work he made, with his thinking. And then he moved himself a little, and took a book to forget his thinking, and then as always, he loved it when he was reading, and then very soon he was deep in his reading, and so he forgot now for a little while that he never could seem to be very understanding.

And so Jeff forgot himself for awhile in his reading, and Melanctha was sleeping. And then Melanctha woke up and she was screaming. "Oh, Jeff, I thought you gone away for always from me. Oh, Jeff, never now go away no more from me. Oh, Jeff, sure, sure, always be just so good to me"



There was a weight in Jeff Campbell from now on, always with him, that he could never lift out from him, to feel easy. He always was trying not to have it in him and he always was trying not to let Melanctha feel it, with him, but it was always there inside him. Now Jeff Campbell always was serious, and dark, and heavy, and sullen, and he would often sit a long time with Melanctha without moving.

“You certainly never have forgiven to me, what I said to you that night, Jeff, now have you?” Melanctha asked him after a long silence, late one evening with him. “It ain’t ever with me a question like forgiving, Melanctha, I got in me. It’s just only what you are feeling for me, makes any difference to me. I ain’t ever seen anything since in you, makes me think you didn’t mean it right, what you said about not thinking now any more I was good, to make it right for you to be really caring so very much to love me.”

“I certainly never did see no man like you, Jeff. You always wanting to have it all clear out in words always, what everybody is always feeling. I certainly don’t see a reason, why I should always be explaining to you what I mean by what I am just saying. And you ain’t got no feeling ever for me, to ask me what I meant, by what I was saying when I was so tired, that night. I never know anything right I was saying.” “But you don’t ever tell me now, Melanctha, so I really hear you say it, you don’t mean it the same way, the way you said it to me.”

“Oh Jeff, you so stupid always to me and always just bothering with your always asking to me. And I don’t never any way remember ever anything I been saying to you, and I am always my head, so it hurts me it half kills me, and my heart jumps so, sometimes I think I die so when it hurts me, and I am so blue always, I think sometimes I take something to just kill me, and I got so much to bother thinking always and doing, and I got so much to worry, and all that, and then you come and ask me what I mean by what I was just saying to you. I certainly don’t know, Jeff, when you ask me. Seems to me, Jeff, sometimes you might have some kind of a right feeling to be careful to me.” “You ain’t got no right

Melanctha Herbert,” flashed out Jeff through his dark, frowning anger, “you certainly ain’t got no right always to be using your being hurt and being sick, and having pain, like a weapon, so as to make me do things it ain’t never right for me to be doing for you. You certainly ain’t got no right to be always holding your pain out to show me.” “What do you mean by them words, Jeff Campbell.” “I certainly do mean them just like I am saying them, Melanctha. You act always, like I been responsible all myself for all our loving one another. And if its anything anyway that ever hurts you, you act like as if it was me made you just begin it all with me. I ain’t no coward, you hear me, Melanctha? I never put my trouble back on anybody, thinking that they made me. I certainly am right ready always, Melanctha, you certainly had ought to know me, to stand all my own trouble for me, but I tell you straight now, the way I think it Melanctha, I ain’t going to be as if I was the reason why you wanted to be loving, and to be suffering so now with me.” “But ain’t you certainly ought to be feeling it so, to be right, Jeff Campbell. Did I ever do anything but just let you do everything you wanted to me. Did I ever try to make you be loving to me. Did I ever do nothing except just sit there ready to endure your loving with me. But I certainly never, Jeff Campbell, did make any kind of way as if I wanted really to be having you for me.”

Jeff stared at Melanctha. “So that’s the way you say it when you are thinking right about it all, Melanctha. Well I certainly ain’t got a word to say ever to you any more, Melanctha, if that’s the way its straight out to you now, Melanctha.” And Jeff almost laughed out to her, and he turned to take his hat and coat, and go away now forever from her.

Melanctha dropped her head on her arms, and she trembled all over and inside her. Jeff stopped a little and looked very sadly at her. Jeff could not so quickly make it right for himself, to leave her.

“Oh, I certainly shall go crazy now, I certainly know that,” Melanctha moaned as she sat there, all fallen and miserable and weak together.

Jeff came and took her in his arms, and held her. Jeff



was very good then to her, but they neither of them felt inside all right, as they once did, to be together.

From now on, Jeff had real torment in him.

Was it true what Melanctha had said that night to him?

Was it true that he was the one had made all this trouble for them? Was it true, he was the only one, who always had had wrong ways in him? Waking or sleeping Jeff now always had this torment going on inside him.

Jeff did not know now any more, what to feel within him. He did not know how to begin thinking out this trouble that must always now be bad inside him. He just felt a confused struggle and resentment always in him, a knowing, no, Melanctha was not right in what she had said that night to him, and then a feeling, perhaps he always had been wrong in the way he never could be understanding. And then would come strong to him, a sense of the deep sweetness in Melanctha's loving and a hating the cold slow way he always had to feel things in him.

Always Jeff knew, sure, Melanctha was wrong in what she had said that night to him, but always Melanctha had had deep feeling with him, always he was poor and slow in the only way he knew how to have any feeling.

Jeff knew Melanctha was wrong, and yet he always had a deep doubt in him. What could he know, who had such slow feeling in him? What could he ever know, who always had to find his way with just thinking. What could he know, who had to be taught such a long time to learn about what was really loving? Jeff now always had this torment in him.

Melanctha was now always making him feel her way, strong whenever she was with him. Did she go on to do it just to show him, did she do it so now because she was no longer loving, did she do it so because that was her way to make him be really loving. Jeff never did know how it was that it all happened so to him.

Melanctha acted now the way she had said it always had been with them. Now it was always Jeff who had to do the asking. Now it was always Jeff who had to ask

when would be the next time he should come to see her. Now always she was good and patient to him, and now always she was kind and loving with him, and always Jeff felt it was, that she was good to give him anything he ever asked or wanted, but never now any more for her own sake to make her happy in him. Now she did these things, as if it was just to please her Jeff Campbell who needed she should now have kindness for him. Always now he was the beggar, with them. Always now Melanctha gave it, not of her need, but from her bounty to him. Always now Jeff found it getting harder for him.

Sometimes Jeff wanted to tear things away from before him, always now he wanted to fight things and be angry with them, and always now Melanctha was so patient to him.

Now, deep inside him, there was always a doubt with Jeff, of Melanctha's loving. It was not a doubt yet to make him really doubting, for with that, Jeff never could be really loving, but always now he knew that something, and that not in him, something was wrong with their loving. Jeff Campbell could not know any right way to think out what was inside Melanctha with her loving, he could not use any way now to reach inside her to find if she was true in her loving, but now something had gone wrong between them, and now he never felt sure in him, the way once she had made him, that now at last he really had got to be understanding. Melanctha was too many for him. He was helpless to find out the way she really felt now for him. Often Jeff would ask her, did she really love him. Always she said, "Yes Jeff, sure, you know that," and now instead of a full sweet strong love with it, Jeff only felt a patient, kind endurance in it.

Jeff did not know. If he was right in such a feeling, he certainly never any more did want to have Melanctha Herbert with him. Jeff Campbell hated badly to think Melanctha never would give him love, just for his sake, and not because she needed it herself, to be with him. Such a way of loving would be very hard for Jeff to be enduring.

"Jeff what makes you act so funny to me. Jeff you certainly now are jealous to me. Sure Jeff, now I don't



see ever why you be so foolish to look so to me.” “Don’t you ever think I can be jealous of anybody ever Melanctha, you hear me. It’s just, you certainly don’t ever understand me. It’s just this way with me always now Melanctha. You love me, and I don’t care anything what you do or what you ever been to anybody. You don’t love me, then I don’t care any more about what you ever do or what you ever be to anybody. But I never want you to be being good Melanctha to me, when it ain’t your loving makes you need it. I certainly don’t ever want to be having any of your kind of kindness to me. If you don’t love me, I can stand it. All I never want to have is your being good to me from kindness. If you don’t love me, then you and I certainly do quit right here Melanctha, all strong feeling, to be always living to each other. It certainly never is anybody I ever am thinking about when I am thinking with you Melanctha, darling. That’s the true way I am telling you Melanctha, always. It’s only your loving me ever gives me anything to bother me Melanctha, so all you got to do, if you don’t really love me, is just certainly to say so to me. I won’t bother you more then than I can help to keep from it Melanctha. You certainly need never to be in any worry, never, about me Melanctha. You just tell me straight out Melanctha, real, the way you feel it. I certainly can stand it all right, I tell you true Melanctha. And I never will care to know why or nothing Melanctha. Loving is just living Melanctha to me, and if you don’t really feel it now Melanctha to me, there ain’t ever nothing between us then Melanctha, is there? That’s straight and honest just the way I always feel it to you now Melanctha. Oh Melanctha, darling, do you love me? Oh Melanctha, please, please, tell me honest, tell me, do you really love me?”

“Oh you so stupid Jeff boy, of course I always love you. Always and always Jeff and I always just so good to you. Oh you so stupid Jeff and don’t know when you got it good with me. Oh dear, Jeff I certainly am so tired Jeff to-night, don’t you go be a bother to me. Yes I love you Jeff, how often you want me to tell you. Oh you so stupid Jeff, but yes I love you. Now I won’t say it no more now tonight Jeff, you hear me. You just be good

Jeff now to me or else I certainly get awful angry with you. Yes I love you, sure, Jeff, though you don’t any way deserve it from me. Yes, yes I love you. Yes Jeff I say it till I certainly am very sleepy. Yes I love you now Jeff, and you certainly must stop asking me to tell you. Oh you great silly boy Jeff Campbell, sure I love you, oh you silly stupid, my own boy Jeff Campbell. Yes I love you and I certainly never won’t say it one more time tonight Jeff, now you hear me.”

Yes Jeff Campbell heard her, and he tried hard to believe her. He did not really doubt her but somehow it was wrong now, the way Melanctha said it. Jeff always now felt baffled with Melanctha. Something, he knew, was not right now in her. Something in her always now was making stronger the torment that was tearing every minute at the joy he once always had had with her. Always now Jeff wondered did Melanctha love him. Always now he was wondering, was Melanctha right when she said, it was he had made all their beginning. Was Melanctha right when she said, it was he had the real responsibility for all the trouble they had and still were having now between them. If she was right, what a brute he always had been in his acting. If she was right, how good she had been to endure the pain he had made so bad so often for her. But no, surely she had made herself to bear it, for her own sake, not for his to make him happy. Surely he was not so twisted in all his long thinking. Surely he could remember right what it was had happened every day in their long loving. Surely he was not so poor a coward as Melanctha always seemed to be thinking. Surely, surely, and then the torment would get worse every minute in him.

One night Jeff Campbell was lying in his bed with his thinking, and night after night now he could not do any sleeping for his thinking. Tonight suddenly he sat up in his bed, and it all came clear to him, and he pounded his pillow with his fist, and he almost shouted out alone there to him, “I ain’t a brute the way Melanctha has been saying. Its all wrong the way I been worried thinking. We did begin fair, each not for the other but for ourselves, what we were wanting. Melanctha Herbert did it just like I did it, because she liked it bad enough to want to stand



it. It's all wrong in me to think it any way except the way we really did it. I certainly don't know now whether she is now real and true in her loving. I ain't got any way ever to find out if she is real and true now always to me. All I know is I didn't ever make her to begin to be with me. Melanctha has got to stand for her own trouble, just like I got to stand for my own trouble. Each man has got to do it for himself when he is in real trouble. Melanctha, she certainly don't remember right when she says I made her begin and then I made her trouble. No by God, I ain't no coward nor a brute either ever to her. I been the way I felt it honest, and that certainly is all about it now between us, and everybody always has just got to stand for their own trouble. I certainly am right this time the way I see it." And Jeff lay down now, at last in comfort, and he slept, and he was free from his long doubting torment.

"You know Melanctha," Jeff Campbell began, the next time he was alone to talk a long time to Melanctha.

"You know Melanctha, sometimes I think a whole lot about what you like to say so much about being game and never doing any hollering. Seems to me Melanctha, I certainly don't understand right what you mean by not hollering. Seems to me it certainly ain't only what comes right away when one is hit, that counts to be brave to be bearing, but all that comes later from your getting sick from the shock of being hurt once in a fight, and all that, and all the being taken care of for years after, and the suffering of your family, and all that, you certainly must stand and not holler, to be certainly really brave the way I understand it." "What you mean Jeff by your talking." "I mean, seems to me really not to holler, is to be strong not to show you ever have been hurt. Seems to me, to get your head hurt from your trouble and to show it, ain't certainly no braver than to say, oh, oh, how bad you hurt me, please don't hurt me mister. It just certainly seems to me, like many people think themselves so game just to stand what we all of us always just got to be standing, and everybody stands it, and we don't certainly none of us like it, and yet we don't ever most of us think we are so much being game, just because we got to stand it."

"I know what you mean now by what you are saying to me now Jeff Campbell. You make a fuss now to me, because I certainly just have stopped standing everything you like to be always doing so cruel to me. But that's just the way always with you Jeff Campbell, if you want to know it. You ain't got no kind of right feeling for all I always been forgiving to you." "I said it once for fun, Melanctha, but now I certainly do mean it, you think you got a right to go where you got no business, and you say, I am so brave nothing can hurt me, and then something, like always, it happens to hurt you, and you show your hurt always so everybody can see it, and you say, I am so brave nothing did hurt me except he certainly didn't have any right to, and see how bad I suffer, but you never hear me make a holler, though certainly anybody got any feeling, to see me suffer, would certainly never touch me except to take good care of me. Sometimes I certainly don't rightly see Melanctha, how much more game that is than just the ordinary kind of holler." "No, Jeff Campbell, and made the way you is you certainly ain't likely ever to be much more understanding." "No, Melanctha, nor you neither. You think always, you are the only one who ever can do any way to really suffer." "Well, and ain't I certainly always been the only person knows how to bear it. No, Jeff Campbell, I certainly be glad to love anybody really worthy, but I made so, I never seem to be able in this world to find him." "No, and your kind of way of thinking, you certainly Melanctha never going to any way be able ever to be finding of him. Can't you understand Melanctha, ever, how no man certainly ever really can hold your love for long times together. You certainly Melanctha, you ain't got down deep loyal feeling, true inside you, and when you ain't just that moment quick with feeling, then you certainly ain't ever got anything more there to keep you. You see Melanctha, it certainly is this way with you, it is, that you ain't ever got any way to remember right what you been doing, or anybody else that has been feeling with you. You certainly Melanctha, never can remember right, when it comes what you have done and what you think happens to you." "It certainly is all easy for you Jeff Campbell to be talking. You remember right, because you don't remember nothing till you get home with your thinking



everything all over, but I certainly don't think much ever of that kind of way of remembering right, Jeff Campbell. I certainly do call it remembering right Jeff Campbell, to remember right just when it happens to you, so you have a right kind of feeling not to act the way you always been doing to me, and then you go home Jeff Campbell, and you begin with your thinking, and then it certainly is very easy for you to be good and forgiving with it. No, that ain't to me, the way of remembering Jeff Campbell, not as I can see it not to make people always suffer, waiting for you certainly to get to do it. Seems to me like Jeff Campbell, I never could feel so like a man was low and to be scorning of him, like that day in the summer, when you threw me off just because you got one of those fits of your remembering. No, Jeff Campbell, its real feeling every moment when its needed, that certainly does seem to me like real remembering. And that way, certainly, you don't never know nothing like what should be right Jeff Campbell. No Jeff, it's me that always certainly has had to bear it with you. It's always me that certainly has had to suffer, while you go home to remember. No you certainly ain't got no sense yet Jeff, what you need to make you really feeling. No, it certainly is me Jeff Campbell, that always has got to be remembering for us both, always. That's what's the true way with us Jeff Campbell, if you want to know what it is I am always thinking." "You is certainly real modest Melanctha, when you do this kind of talking, you sure is Melanctha," said Jeff Campbell laughing. "I think sometimes Melanctha I am certainly awful conceited, when I think sometimes I am all out doors, and I think I certainly am so bright, and better than most everybody I ever got anything now to do with, but when I hear you talk this way Melanctha, I certainly do think I am a real modest kind of fellow." "Modest!" said Melanctha, angry, "Modest, that certainly is a queer thing for you Jeff to be calling yourself even when you are laughing." "Well it certainly does depend a whole lot what you are thinking with," said Jeff Campbell. "I never did use to think I was so much on being real modest Melanctha, but now I know really I am, when I hear you talking. I see all the time there are many people living just as good as I am, though they are a little different to me. Now

with you Melanctha if I understand you right what you are talking, you don't think that way of no other one that you are ever knowing." "I certainly could be real modest too, Jeff Campbell," said Melanctha, "If I could meet somebody once I could keep right on respecting when I got so I was really knowing with them. But I certainly never met anybody like that yet, Jeff Campbell, if you want to know it." "No, Melanctha, and with the way you got of thinking, it certainly don't look like as if you ever will Melanctha, with your never remembering anything only what you just then are feeling in you, and you not understanding what any one else is ever feeling, if they don't holler just the way you are doing. No Melanctha, I certainly don't see any ways you are likely ever to meet one, so good as you are always thinking you be."

"No, Jeff Campbell, it certainly ain't that way with me at all the way you say it. It's because I am always knowing what it is I am wanting, when I get it. I certainly don't never have to wait till I have it, and then throw away what I got in me, and then come back and say, that's a mistake I just been making, it ain't that never at all like I understood it, I want to have, bad, what I didn't think it was I wanted. It's that way of knowing right what I am wanting, makes me feel nobody can come right with me, when I am feeling things, Jeff Campbell. I certainly do say Jeff Campbell, I certainly don't think much of the way you always do it, always never knowing what it is you are ever really wanting and everybody always got to suffer. No Jeff, I don't certainly think there is much doubting which is better and the stronger with us two, Jeff Campbell."

"As you will, Melanctha Herbert," cried Jeff Campbell, and he rose up, and he thundered out a black oath, and he was fierce to leave her now forever, and then with the same movement, he took her in his arms and held her.

"What a silly goose boy you are, Jeff Campbell," Melanctha whispered to him fondly.

"Oh yes," said Jeff, very dreary. "I never could keep really mad with anybody, not when I was a little boy and playing. I used most to cry sometimes, I couldn't



get real mad and keep on a long time with it, the way everybody always did it. It's certainly no use to me Melanctha, I certainly can't ever keep mad with you Melanctha, my dear one. But don't you ever be thinking it's because I think you right in what you been just saying to me. I don't Melanctha really think it that way, honest, though I certainly can't get mad the way I ought to. No Melanctha, little girl, really truly, you ain't right the way you think it. I certainly do know that Melanctha, honest. You certainly don't do me right Melanctha, the way you say you are thinking. Goodbye Melanctha, though you certainly is my own little girl for always." And then they were very good a little to each other, and then Jeff went away for that evening, from her.

Melanctha had begun now once more to wander. Melanctha did not yet always wander, but a little now she needed to begin to look for others. Now Melanctha Herbert began again to be with some of the better kind of black girls, and with them she sometimes wandered. Melanctha had not yet come again to need to be alone, when she wandered.

Jeff Campbell did not know that Melanctha had begun again to wander. All Jeff knew, was that now he could not be so often with her

Jeff never knew how it had come to happen to him, but now he never thought to go to see Melanctha Herbert, until he had before, asked her if she could be going to have time then to have him with her. Then Melanctha would think a little, and then she would say to him, "Let me see Jeff, to-morrow, you was just saying to me. I certainly am awful busy you know Jeff just now. It certainly does seem to me this week Jeff, I can't anyways fix it. Sure I want to see you soon Jeff. I certainly Jeff got to do a little more now, I been giving so much time, when I had no business, just to be with you when you asked me. Now I guess Jeff, I certainly can't see you no more this week Jeff, the way I got to do things." "All right Melanctha," Jeff would answer and he would be very angry. "I want to come only just certainly as you want me now Melanctha." "Now Jeff you know I certainly can't be neglecting always to be

with everybody just to see you. You come see me next week Tuesday Jeff, you hear me. I don't think Jeff I certainly be so busy, Tuesday." Jeff Campbell would then go away and leave her, and he would be hurt and very angry, for it was hard for a man with a great pride in himself, like Jeff Campbell, to feel himself no better than a beggar. And yet he always came as she said he should, on the day she had fixed for him, and always Jeff Campbell was not sure yet that he really understood what it was Melanctha wanted. Always Melanctha said to him, yes she loved him, sure he knew that. Always Melanctha said to him, she certainly did love him just the same as always, only sure he knew now she certainly did seem to be right busy with all she certainly now had to be doing.

Jeff never knew what Melanctha had to do now, that made her always be so busy, but Jeff Campbell never cared to ask Melanctha such a question. Besides Jeff knew Melanctha Herbert would never, in such a matter, give him any kind of a real answer. Jeff did not know whether it was that Melanctha did not know how to give a simple answer. And then how could he, Jeff, know what was important to her. Jeff Campbell always felt strongly in him, he had no right to interfere with Melanctha in any practical kind of a matter. There they had always, never asked each other any kind of question. There they had felt always in each other, not any right to take care of one another. And Jeff Campbell now felt less than he had ever, any right to claim to know what Melanctha thought it right that she should do in any of her ways of living. All Jeff felt a right in himself to question, was her loving. Jeff learned every day now, more and more, how much it was that he could really suffer. Sometimes it hurt so in him, when he was alone, it would force some slow tears from him. But every day, now that Jeff Campbell, knew more how it could hurt him, he lost his feeling of deep awe that he once always had had for Melanctha's feeling. Suffering was not so much after all, thought Jeff Campbell, if even he could feel it so it hurt him. It hurt him bad, just the way he knew he once had hurt Melanctha, and yet he too could have it and not make any kind of a loud holler with it.



In tender hearted natures, those that mostly never feel strong passion, suffering often comes to make them harder. When these do not know in themselves what it is to suffer, suffering is then very awful to them and they badly want to help everyone who ever has to suffer, and they have a deep reverence for anybody who knows really how to always suffer. But when it comes to them to really suffer, they soon begin to lose their fear and tenderness and wonder. Why it isn't so very much to suffer, when even I can bear to do it. It isn't very pleasant to be having all the time, to stand it, but they are not so much wiser after all, all the others just because they know too how to bear it.

Passionate natures who have always made themselves, to suffer, that is all the kind of people who have emotions that come to them as sharp as a sensation, they always get more tender-hearted when they suffer, and it always does them good to suffer. Tender-hearted, unpassionate, and comfortable natures always get much harder when they suffer, for so they lose the fear and reverence and wonder they once had for everybody who ever has to suffer, for now they know themselves what it is to suffer and it is not so awful any longer to them when they know too, just as well as all the others, how to have it.

And so it came in these days to Jeff Campbell. Jeff knew now always, way inside him, what it is to really suffer, and now every day with it, he knew how to understand Melanctha better. Jeff Campbell still loved Melanctha Herbert and he still had a real trust in her and he still had a little hope that some day they would once more get together, but slowly, every day, this hope in him would keep growing always weaker. They still were a good deal of time together, but now they never any more were really trusting with each other. In the days when they used to be together, Jeff had felt he did not know much what was inside Melanctha, but he knew very well, how very deep always was his trust in her; now he knew Melanctha Herbert better, but now he never felt a deep trust in her. Now Jeff never could be really honest with her. He never doubted yet, that she was steady only to him, but somehow he could not believe much really in Melanctha's loving.

Melanctha Herbert was a little angry now when Jeff asked her, "I never give nobody before Jeff, ever more than one chance with me, and I certainly been giving you most a hundred Jeff, you hear me." "And why shouldn't you Melanctha, give me a million, if you really love me!" Jeff flashed out very angry. "I certainly don't know as you deserve that anyways from me, Jeff Campbell." "It ain't deserving, I am ever talking about to you Melanctha. Its loving, and if you are really loving to me you won't certainly never any ways call them chances." "Deed Jeff, you certainly are getting awful wise Jeff now, ain't you, to me." "No I ain't Melanctha, and I ain't jealous either to you. I just am doubting from the way you are always acting to me."

"Oh yes Jeff, that's what they all say, the same way, when they certainly got jealousy all through them. You ain't got no cause to be jealous with me Jeff, and I am awful tired of all this talking now, you hear me."

Jeff Campbell never asked Melanctha any more if she loved him. Now things were always getting worse between them. Now Jeff was always very silent with Melanctha. Now Jeff never wanted to be honest to her, and now Jeff never had much to say to her.

Now when they were together, it was Melanctha always did most of the talking. Now she often had other girls there with her. Melanctha was always kind to Jeff Campbell but she never seemed to need to be alone now with him. She always treated Jeff, like her best friend, and she always spoke so to him and yet she never seemed now to very often want to see him. Every day it was getting harder for Jeff Campbell. It was as if now, when he had learned to really love Melanctha, she did not need any more to have him. Jeff began to know this very well inside him.

Jeff Campbell did not know yet that Melanctha had begun again to wander. Jeff was not very quick to suspect Melanctha. All Jeff knew was, that he did not trust her to be now really loving to him.

Jeff was no longer now in any doubt inside him. He knew very well now he really loved Melanctha. He knew



now very well she was not any more a real religion to him. Jeff Campbell knew very well too now inside him, he did not really want Melanctha, now if he could no longer trust her, though he loved her hard and really knew now what it was to suffer.

Every day Melanctha Herbert was less and less near to him. She always was very pleasant in her talk and to be with him, but somehow now it never was any comfort to him.

Melanctha Herbert now always had a lot of friends around her. Jeff Campbell never wanted to be with them. Now Melanctha began to find it, she said it often to him, always harder to arrange to be alone now with him. Sometimes she would be late for him. Then Jeff always would try to be patient in his waiting, for Jeff Campbell knew very well how to remember, and he knew it was only right that he should now endure this from her.

Then Melanctha began to manage often not to see him, and once she went away when she had promised to be there to meet him.

Then Jeff Campbell was really filled up with his anger. Now he knew he could never really want her. Now he knew he never any more could really trust her.

Jeff Campbell never knew why Melanctha had not come to meet him. Jeff had heard a little talking now, about how Melanctha Herbert had commenced once more to wander. Jeff Campbell still sometimes saw Jane Harden, who always needed a doctor to be often there to help her. Jane Harden always knew very well what happened to Melanctha. Jeff Campbell never would talk to Jane Harden anything about Melanctha. Jeff was always loyal to Melanctha. Jeff never let Jane Harden say much to him about Melanctha, though he never let her know that now he loved her. But somehow Jeff did know now about Melanctha, and he knew about some men that Melanctha met with Rose Johnson very often.

Jeff Campbell would not let himself really doubt Melanctha, but Jeff began to know now very well, he did not want her. Melanctha Herbert did not love him ever. Jeff knew it now, the way he once had thought that

she could feel it. Once she had been greater for him than he had thought he could ever know how to feel it. Now Jeff had come to where he could understand Melanctha Herbert. Jeff was not bitter to her because she could not really love him, he was bitter only that he had let himself have a real illusion in him. He was a little bitter too, that he had lost now, what he had always felt real in the world, that had made it for him always full of beauty, and now he had not got this new religion really, and he had lost what he before had to know what was good and had real beauty.

Jeff Campbell was so angry now in him, because he had begged Melanctha always to be honest to him. Jeff could stand it in her not to love him, he could not stand it in her not to be honest to him.

Jeff Campbell went home from where Melanctha had not met him, and he was sore and full of anger in him.

Jeff Campbell could not be sure what to do, to make it right inside him. Surely he must be strong now and cast this loving from him, and yet, was he sure he now had real wisdom in him. Was he sure that Melanctha Herbert never had had a real deep loving for him. Was he sure Melanctha Herbert never had deserved a reverence from him. Always now Jeff had this torment in him, but always now he felt more that Melanctha never had real greatness for him.

Jeff waited to see if Melanctha would send any word to him. Melanctha Herbert never sent a line to him.

At last Jeff wrote his letter to Melanctha. "Dear Melanctha, I certainly do know you ain't been any way sick this last week when you never met me right the way you promised, and never sent me any word to say why you acted a way you certainly never could think was the right way you should do it to me. Jane Harden said she saw you that day and you went out walking with some people you like now to be with. Don't be misunderstanding me now any more Melanctha. I love you now because that's my slow way to learn what you been teaching, but I know now you certainly never had what seems to me real kind of feeling. I don't love you



Melanctha any more now like a real religion, because now I know you are just made like all us others. I know now no man can ever really hold you because no man can ever be real to trust in you, because you mean right Melanctha, but you never can remember, and so you certainly never have got any way to be honest. So please you understand me right now Melanctha, it never is I don't know how to love you. I do know now how to love you, Melanctha, really. You sure do know that, Melanctha, in me. You certainly always can trust me. And so now Melanctha, I can say to you certainly real honest with you, I am better than you are in my right kind of feeling. And so Melanctha, I don't never any more want to be a trouble to you. You certainly make me see things Melanctha, I never any other way could be knowing. You been very good and patient to me, when I was certainly below you in my right feeling. I certainly never have been near so good and patient to you every any way Melanctha, I certainly know that Melanctha. But Melanctha, with me, it certainly is, always to be good together, two people certainly must be thinking each one as good as the other, to be really loving right Melanctha. And it certainly must never be any kind of feeling, of one only taking, and one only just giving, Melanctha, to me. I know you certainly don't really ever understand me now Melanctha, but that's no matter. I certainly do know what I am feeling now with you real Melanctha. And so good-bye now for good Melanctha. I say I can never ever really trust you real Melanctha, that's only just certainly from your way of not being ever equal in your feeling to anybody real, Melanctha, and your way never to know right how to remember. Many ways I really trust you deep Melanctha, and I certainly do feel deep all the good sweetness you certainly got real in you Melanctha. Its only just in your loving me Melanctha. You never can be equal to me and that way I certainly never can bear any more to have it. And so now Melanctha, I always be your friend, if you need me, and now we never see each other any more to talk to."

And then Jeff Campbell thought and thought, and he could never make any way for him now, to see it different, and so at last he sent this letter to Melanctha.

And now surely it was all over in Jeff Campbell. Surely now he never any more could know Melanctha. And yet, perhaps Melanctha really loved him. And then she would know how much it hurt him never any more, any way, to see her, and perhaps she would write a line to tell him. But that was a foolish way for Jeff ever to be thinking. Of course Melanctha never would write a word to him. It was all over now for always, everything between them, and Jeff felt it a real relief to him.

For many days now Jeff Campbell only felt it as a relief in him. Jeff was all locked up and quiet now inside him. It was all settling down heavy in him, and these days when it was sinking so deep in him, it was only the rest and quiet of not fighting that he could really feel inside him. Jeff Campbell could not think now, or feel anything else in him. He had no beauty nor any goodness to see around him. It was a dull, pleasant kind of quiet he now had inside him. Jeff almost began to love this dull quiet in him, for it was more nearly being free for him than anything he had known in him since Melanctha Herbert first had moved him. He did not find it a real rest yet for him, he had not really conquered what had been working so long in him, he had not learned to see beauty and real goodness yet in what had happened to him, but it was rest even if he was sodden now all through him. Jeff Campbell liked it very well, not to have fighting always going on inside him.

And so Jeff went on every day, and he was quiet, and he began again to watch himself in his working; and he did not see any beauty now around him, and it was dull and heavy always now inside him, and yet he was content to have gone so far in keeping steady to what he knew was the right way for him to come back to, to be regular, and see beauty in every kind of quiet way of living, the way he had always wanted it for himself and for all the colored people. He knew he had lost the sense he once had of joy all through him, but he could work, and perhaps he would bring some real belief back into him about the beauty that he could not now any more see around him.

And so Jeff Campbell went on with his working, and



he staid home every evening, and he began again with his reading, and he did not do much talking, and he did not seem to himself to have any kind of feeling. And one day Jeff thought perhaps he really was forgetting, one day he thought he could soon come back and be happy in his old way of regular and quiet living.

Jeff Campbell had never talked to any one of what had been going on inside him. Jeff Campbell liked to talk and he was honest, but it never came out from him, anything he was ever really feeling, it only came out from him, what it was that he was always thinking. Jeff Campbell always was very proud to hide what he was really feeling. Always he blushed hot to think things he had been feeling. Only to Melanctha Herbert, had it ever come to him, to tell what it was that he was feeling.

And so Jeff Campbell went on with this dull and sodden, heavy, quiet always in him, and he never seemed to be able to have any feeling. Only sometimes he shivered hot with shame when he remembered some things he once had been feeling. And then one day it all woke up, and was sharp in him.

Dr. Campbell was just then staying long times with a sick man who might soon be dying. One day the sick man was resting. Dr. Campbell went to the window to look out a little, while he was waiting. It was very early now in the southern springtime. The trees were just beginning to get the little zigzag crinkles in them, which the young buds always give them. The air was soft and moist and pleasant to them. The earth was wet and rich and smelling for them. The birds were making sharp fresh noises all around them. The wind was very gentle and yet urgent to them. And the buds and the long earthworms, and the negroes, and all the kinds of children, were coming out every minute farther into the new spring, watery, southern sunshine.

Jeff Campbell too began to feel a little his old joy inside him. The sodden quiet began to break up in him. He leaned far out of the window to mix it all up with him. His heart went sharp and then it almost stopped inside him. Was it Melanctha Herbert he had just seen passing by him? Was it Melanctha, or was it just some

other girl, who made him feel so bad inside him? Well, it was no matter, Melanctha was there in the world around him, he did certainly always know that in him.

Melanctha Herbert was always in the same town with him, and he could never any more feel her near him. What a fool he was to throw her from him. Did he know she did not really love him. Suppose Melanctha was now suffering through him. Suppose she really would be glad to see him. And did anything else he did, really mean anything now to him? What a fool he was to cast her from him. And yet did Melanctha Herbert want him, was she honest to him, had Melanctha ever loved him, and did Melanctha now suffer by him? Oh! Oh! Oh! and the bitter water once more rose up in him.

All that long day, with the warm moist young spring stirring in him, Jeff Campbell worked, and thought, and beat his breast, and wandered, and spoke aloud, and was silent, and was certain, and then in doubt and then keen to surely feel, and then all sodden in him; and he walked, and he sometimes ran fast to lose himself in his rushing, and he bit his nails to pain and bleeding, and he tore his hair so that he could be sure he was really feeling, and he never could know what it was right, he now should be doing. And then late that night he wrote it all out to Melanctha Herbert, and he made himself quickly send it without giving himself any time to change it.

“It has come to me strong to-day Melanctha, perhaps I am wrong the way I now am thinking. Perhaps you do want me badly to be with you. Perhaps I have hurt you once again the way I used to. I certainly Melanctha, if I ever think that really, I certainly do want bad not to be wrong now ever any more to you. If you do feel the way to-day it came to me strong maybe you are feeling, then say so Melanctha to me, and I come again to see you. If not, don’t say anything any more ever to me. I don’t want ever to be bad to you Melanctha, really. I never want ever to be a bother to you. I never can stand it to think I am wrong; really, thinking you don’t want me to come to you. Tell me Melanctha, tell me honest to me, shall I come now any more to see you.” “Yes” came the answer from Melanctha, “I be home Jeff tonight to see you.”



Jeff Campbell went that evening late to see Melanctha Herbert. As Jeff came nearer to her, he doubted that he wanted really to be with her, he felt that he did not know what it was he now wanted from her. Jeff Campbell knew very well now, way inside him, that they could never talk their trouble out between them. What was it Jeff wanted now to tell Melanctha Herbert? What was it that Jeff Campbell now could tell her? Surely he never now could learn to trust her. Surely Jeff knew very well all that Melanctha always had inside her. And yet it was awful, never any more to see her.

Jeff Campbell went in to Melanctha, and he kissed her, and he held her, and then he went away from her and he stood still and looked at her. “Well Jeff!” “Yes Melanctha!” “Jeff what was it made you act so to me?” “You know very well Melanctha, it’s always I am thinking you don’t love me, and you are acting to me good out of kindness, and then Melanctha you certainly never did say anything to me why you never came to meet me, as you certainly did promise to me you would that day I never saw you!” “Jeff don’t you really know for certain, I always love you?” “No Melanctha, deed I don’t know it in me. Deed and certain sure Melanctha, if I only know that in me, I certainly never would give you any bother.” “Jeff, I certainly do love you more seems to me always, you certainly had ought to feel that in you.” “Sure Melanctha?” “Sure Jeff boy, you know that.” “But then Melanctha why did you act so to me?” “Oh Jeff you certainly been such a bother to me. I just had to go away that day Jeff, and I certainly didn’t mean not to tell you, and then that letter you wrote came to me and something happened to me. I don’t know right what it was Jeff, I just kind of fainted, and what could I do Jeff, you said you certainly never any more wanted to come and see me!” “And no matter Melanctha, even if you knew, it was just killing me to act so to you, you never would have said nothing to me?” “No of course, how could I Jeff when you wrote that way to me. I know how you was feeling Jeff to me, but I certainly couldn’t say nothing to you.” “Well Melanctha, I certainly know I am right proud too in me, but I certainly never could act so to you Melanctha, if I ever knew any way at all you

ever really loved me. No Melanctha darling, you and me certainly don’t feel much the same way ever. Any way Melanctha, I certainly do love you true Melanctha.” “And I love you too Jeff, even though you don’t never certainly seem to believe me.” “No I certainly don’t any way believe you Melanctha, even when you say it to me. I don’t know Melanctha how, but sure I certainly do trust you, only I don’t believe now ever in your really being loving to me. I certainly do know you trust me always Melanctha, only somehow it ain’t ever all right to me. I certainly don’t know any way otherwise Melanctha, how I can say it to you.” “Well I certainly can’t help you no ways any more Jeff Campbell, though you certainly say it right when you say I trust you Jeff now always. You certainly is the best man Jeff Campbell, I ever can know, to me. I never been anyways thinking it can be ever different to me.

“Well you trust me then Melanctha, and I certainly love you Melanctha, and seems like to me Melanctha, you and me had ought to be a little better than we certainly ever are doing now to be together. You certainly do think that way, too, Melanctha to me. But may be you do really love me. Tell me, please, real honest now Melanctha darling, tell me so I really always know it in me, do you really truly love me?” “Oh you stupid, stupid boy, Jeff Campbell. Love you, what do you think makes me always to forgive you. If I certainly didn’t always love you Jeff, I certainly never would let you be always being all the time such a bother to me the way you certainly Jeff always are to me. Now don’t you dass ever any more say words like that ever to me. You hear me now Jeff, or I do something real bad sometime, so I really hurt you. Now Jeff you just be good to me. You know Jeff how bad I need it, now you should always be good to me!”

Jeff Campbell could not make an answer to Melanctha. What was it he should now say to her? What words could help him to make their feeling any better? Jeff Campbell knew that he had learned to love deeply, that, he always knew very well now in him, Melanctha had learned to be strong to be always trusting, that he knew too now inside him, but Melanctha did not really love him, that he felt



always too strong for him. That fact always was there in him, and it always thrust itself firm, between them. And so this talk did not make things really better for them.

Jeff Campbell was never any more a torment to Melanctha, he was only silent to her. Jeff often saw Melanctha and he was very friendly with her and he never any more was a bother to her. Jeff never any more now had much chance to be loving with her. Melanctha never was alone now when he saw her.

Melanctha Herbert had just been getting thick in her trouble with Jeff Campbell, when she went to that church where she first met Rose, who later was married regularly to Sam Johnson. Rose was a good-looking, better kind of black girl, and had been brought up quite like their own child by white folks. Rose was living now with colored people. Rose was staying just then with a colored woman, who had known ‘Mis’ Herbert and her black husband and this girl Melanctha.

Rose soon got to like Melanctha Herbert and Melanctha now always wanted to be with Rose, whenever she could do it. Melanctha Herbert always was doing everything for Rose that she could think of that Rose ever wanted. Rose always liked to be with nice people who would do things for her. Rose had strong common sense and she was lazy. Rose liked Melanctha Herbert, she had such kind of fine ways in her. Then, too, Rose had it in her to be sorry for the subtle, sweet-natured, docile, intelligent Melanctha Herbert who always was so blue sometimes, and always had had so much trouble. Then, too, Rose could scold Melanctha, for Melanctha Herbert never could know how to keep herself from trouble, and Rose was always strong to keep straight, with her simple selfish wisdom.

But why did the subtle, intelligent, attractive, half white girl Melanctha Herbert, with her sweetness and her power and her wisdom, demean herself to do for and to flatter and to be scolded, by this lazy, stupid, ordinary, selfish black girl. This was a queer thing in Melanctha Herbert.

And so now in these new spring days, it was with

Rose that Melanctha began again to wander. Rose always knew very well in herself what was the right way to do when you wandered. Rose knew very well, she was not just any common kind of black girl, for she had been raised by white folks, and Rose always saw to it that she was engaged to him when she had any one man with whom she ever always wandered. Rose always had strong in her the sense for proper conduct. Rose always was telling the complex and less sure Melanctha, what was the right way she should do when she wandered. Rose never knew much about Jeff Campbell with Melanctha Herbert. Rose had not known about Melanctha Herbert when she had been almost all her time with Dr. Campbell.

Jeff Campbell did not like Rose when he saw her with Melanctha. Jeff would never, when he could help it, meet her. Rose did not think much about Dr. Campbell. Melanctha never talked much about him to her. He was not important now to be with her.

Rose did not like Melanctha’s old friend Jane Harden when she saw her. Jane despised Rose for an ordinary, stupid, sullen black girl. Jane could not see what Melanctha could find in that black girl, to endure her.

It made Jane sick to see her. But then Melanctha had a good mind, but she certainly never did care much to really use it. Jane Harden now really never cared any more to see Melanctha, though Melanctha still always tried to be good to her. And Rose, she hated that stuck up, mean speaking, nasty, drunk thing, Jane Harden. Rose did not see how Melanctha could bear to ever see her, but Melanctha always was so good to everybody, she never would know how to act to people the way they deserved that she should do it.

Rose did not know much about Melanctha, and Jeff Campbell and Jane Harden. All Rose knew about Melanctha was her old life with her mother and her father. Rose was always glad to be good to poor Melanctha, who had had such an awful time with her mother and her father, and now she was alone and had nobody who could help her. “He was a awful black man to you Melanctha, I like to get my hands on him so he



certainly could feel it. I just would Melanctha, now you hear me.”

Perhaps it was this simple faith and simple anger and simple moral way of doing in Rose, that Melanctha now found such a comfort to her. Rose was selfish and was stupid and was lazy, but she was decent and knew always what was the right way she should do, and what she wanted, and she certainly did admire how bright was her friend Melanctha Herbert, and she certainly did feel how very much it was she always suffered and she scolded her to keep her from more trouble, and she never was angry when she found some of the different ways Melanctha Herbert sometimes had to do it.

And so always Rose and Melanctha were more and more together, and Jeff Campbell could now hardly ever any more be alone with Melanctha.

Once Jeff had to go away to another town to see a sick man. “When I come back Monday Melanctha, I come Monday evening to see you. You be home alone once Melanctha to see me.” “Sure Jeff, I be glad to see you!” When Jeff Campbell came to his house on Monday there was a note there from Melanctha. Could Jeff come day after to-morrow, Wednesday? Melanctha was so sorry she had to go out that evening. She was awful sorry and she hoped Jeff would not be angry.

Jeff was angry and he swore a little, and then he laughed, and then he sighed. “Poor Melanctha, she don’t know any way to be real honest, but no matter, I sure do love her and I be good if only she will let me.”

Jeff Campbell went Wednesday night to see Melanctha. Jeff Campbell took her in his arms and kissed her. “I certainly am awful sorry not to see you Jeff Monday, the way I promised, but I just couldn’t Jeff, no way I could fix it.” Jeff looked at her and then he laughed a little at her. “You want me to believe that really now Melanctha. All right I believe it if you want me to Melanctha. I certainly be good to you to-night the way you like it. I believe you certainly did want to see me Melanctha, and there was no way you could fix it.” “Oh Jeff dear,” said Melanctha, “I sure was wrong to act

so to you. It’s awful hard for me ever to say it to you, I have been wrong in my acting to you, but I certainly was bad this time Jeff to you. It do certainly come hard to me to say it Jeff, but I certainly was wrong to go away from you the way I did it. Only you always certainly been so bad Jeff, and such a bother to me, and making everything always so hard for me, and I certainly got some way to do it to make it come back sometimes to you. You bad boy Jeff, now you hear me, and this certainly is the first time Jeff I ever yet said it to anybody, I ever been wrong, Jeff, you hear me!” “All right Melanctha, I sure do forgive you, cause it’s certainly the first time I ever heard you say you ever did anything wrong the way you shouldn’t,” and Jeff Campbell laughed and kissed her, and Melanctha laughed and loved him, and they really were happy now for a little time together. And now they were very happy in each other and then they were silent and then they became a little sadder and then they were very quiet once more with each other.

“Yes I certainly do love you Jeff!” Melanctha said and she was very dreamy. “Sure, Melanctha.” “Yes Jeff sure, but not the way you are now ever thinking. I love you more and more seems to me Jeff always, and I certainly do trust you more and more always to me when I know you. I do love you Jeff, sure yes, but not the kind of way of loving you are ever thinking it now Jeff with me. I ain’t got certainly no hot passion any more now in me. You certainly have killed all that kind of feeling now Jeff in me. You certainly do know that Jeff, now the way I am always, when I am loving with you. You certainly do know that Jeff, and that’s the way you certainly do like it now in me. You certainly don’t mind now Jeff, to hear me say this to you.”

Jeff Campbell was hurt so that it almost killed him. Yes he certainly did know now what it was to have real hot love in him, and yet Melanctha certainly was right, he did not deserve she should ever give it to him. “All right Melanctha I ain’t ever kicking. I always will give you certainly always everything you want that I got in me. I take anything you want now to give me. I don’t say never Melanctha it don’t hurt me, but I certainly don’t say ever Melanctha it ought ever to be any different to



me.” And the bitter tears rose up in Jeff Campbell, and they came and choked his voice to be silent, and he held himself hard to keep from breaking.

“Good-night Melanctha,” and Jeff was very humble to her. “Goodnight Jeff, I certainly never did mean any way to hurt you. I do love you, sure Jeff every day more and more, all the time I know you.” “I know Melanctha, I know, it’s never nothing to me. You can’t help it, anybody ever the way they are feeling. It’s all right now Melanctha, you believe me, good-night now Melanctha, I got now to leave you, good-bye Melanctha, sure don’t look so worried to me, sure Melanctha I come again soon to see you.” And then Jeff stumbled down the steps, and he went away fast to leave her.

And now the pain came hard and harder in Jeff Campbell, and he groaned, and it hurt him so, he could not bear it. And the tears came, and his heart beat, and he was hot and worn and bitter in him.

Now Jeff knew very well what it was to love Melanctha.

Now Jeff Campbell knew he was really understanding.

Now Jeff knew what it was to be good to Melanctha.

Now Jeff was good to her always.

Slowly Jeff felt it a comfort in him to have it hurt so, and to be good to Melanctha always. Now there was no way Melanctha ever had had to bear things from him, worse than he now had it in him. Now Jeff was strong inside him. Now with all the pain there was peace in him. Now he knew he was understanding, now he knew he had a hot love in him, and he was good always to Melanctha Herbert who was the one had made him have it. Now he knew he could be good, and not cry out for help to her to teach him how to bear it. Every day Jeff felt himself more a strong man, the way he once had thought was his real self, the way he knew it. Now Jeff Campbell had real wisdom in him, and it did not make him bitter when it hurt him, for Jeff knew now all through him that he was really strong to bear it.

And so now Jeff Campbell could see Melanctha

often, and he was patient, and always very friendly to her, and every day Jeff Campbell understood Melanctha Herbert better. And always Jeff saw Melanctha could not love him the way he needed she should do it. Melanctha Herbert had no way she ever really could remember.

And now Jeff knew there was a man Melanctha met very often, and perhaps she wanted to try to have this man to be good, for her. Jeff Campbell never saw the man Melanctha Herbert perhaps now wanted. Jeff Campbell only knew very well that there was one. Then there was Rose that Melanctha now always had with her when she wandered.

Jeff Campbell was very quiet to Melanctha. He said to her, now he thought he did not want to come any more especially to see her. When they met, he always would be glad to see her, but now he never would go anywhere any more to meet her. Sure he knew she always would have a deep love in him for her. Sure she knew that. “Yes Jeff, I always trust you Jeff, I certainly do know that all right.” Jeff Campbell said, all right he never could say anything to reproach her. She knew always that he really had learned all through him how to love her. “Yes, Jeff, I certainly do know that.” She knew now she could always trust him. Jeff always would be loyal to her though now she never was any more to him like a religion, but he never could forget the real sweetness in her. That Jeff must remember always, though now he never can trust her to be really loving to any man for always, she never did have any way she ever could remember. If she ever needed anybody to be good to her, Jeff Campbell always would do anything he could to help her. He never can forget the things she taught him so he could be really understanding, but he never any more wants to see her. He be like a brother to her always, when she needs it, and he always will be a good friend to her. Jeff Campbell certainly was sorry never any more to see her, but it was good that they now knew each other really. “Good-bye Jeff you always been very good always to me.” “Good-bye Melanctha you know you always can trust yourself to me.” “Yes, I know, I know Jeff, really.”

“I certainly got to go now Melanctha, from you. I go



this time, Melanctha really,” and Jeff Campbell went away and this time he never looked back to her. This time Jeff Campbell just broke away and left her.

Jeff Campbell loved to think now he was strong again to be quiet, and to live regular, and to do everything the way he wanted it to be right for himself and all the colored people. Jeff went away for a little while to another town to work there, and he worked hard, and he was very sad inside him, and sometimes the tears would rise up in him, and then he would work hard, and then he would begin once more to see some beauty in the world around him. Jeff had behaved right and he had learned to have a real love in him. That was very good to have inside him.

Jeff Campbell never could forget the sweetness in Melanctha Herbert, and he was always very friendly to her, but they never any more came close to one another. More and more Jeff Campbell and Melanctha fell away from all knowing of each other, but Jeff never could forget Melanctha. Jeff never could forget the real sweetness she had in her, but Jeff never any more had the sense of a real religion for her. Jeff always had strong in him the meaning of all the new kind of beauty Melanctha Herbert once had shown him, and always more and more it helped him with his working for himself and for all the colored people. Melanctha Herbert, now that she was all through with Jeff Campbell, was free to be with Rose and the new men she met now.

Rose was always now with Melanctha Herbert. Rose never found any way to get excited. Rose always was telling Melanctha Herbert the right way she should do, so that she would not always be in trouble. But Melanctha Herbert could not help it, always she would find new ways to get excited.

Melanctha was all ready now to find new ways to be in trouble. And yet Melanctha Herbert never wanted not to do right. Always Melanctha Herbert wanted peace and quiet, and always she could only find new ways to get excited.

“Melanctha,” Rose would say to her, “Melanctha, I

certainly have got to tell you, you ain’t right to act so with that kind of feller. You better just had stick to black men now, Melanctha, you hear me what I tell you, just the way you always see me do it. They’re real bad men, now I tell you Melanctha true, and you better had hear to me. I been raised by real nice kind of white folks, Melanctha, and I certainly knows awful well, soon as ever I can see ‘em acting, what is a white man will act decent to you and the kind it ain’t never no good to a colored girl to ever go with. Now you know real Melanctha how I always mean right good to you, and you ain’t got no way like me Melanctha, what was raised by white folks, to know right what is the way you should be acting with men. I don’t never want to see you have bad trouble come hard to you now Melanctha, and so you just hear to me now Melanctha, what I tell you, for I knows it. I don’t say never certainly to you Melanctha, you never had ought to have nothing to do ever with no white men, though it ain’t never to me Melanctha, the best kind of a way a colored girl can have to be acting, no I never do say to you Melanctha, you hadn’t never ought to be with white men, though it ain’t never the way I feel it ever real, right for a decent colored girl to be always doing, but not never Melanctha, now you hear me, no not never no kind of white men like you been with always now Melanctha when I see you. You just hear to me Melanctha, you certainly had ought to hear to me Melanctha, I say it just like I knows it awful well, Melanctha, and I knows you don’t know no better, Melanctha, how to act so, the ways I seen it with them kind of white fellers, them as never can know what to do right by a decent girl they have ever got to be with them. Now you hear to me Melanctha, what I tell you.”

And so it was Melanctha Herbert found new ways to be in trouble. But it was not very bad this trouble, for these white men Rose never wanted she should be with, never meant very much to Melanctha. It was only that she liked it to be with them, and they knew all about fine horses, and it was just good to Melanctha, now a little, to feel real reckless with them. But mostly it was Rose and other better kind of colored girls and colored men with whom Melanctha Herbert now always wandered.



It was summer now and the colored people came out into the sunshine, full blown with the flowers. And they shone in the streets and in the fields with their warm joy, and they glistened in their black heat, and they flung themselves free in their wide abandonment of shouting laughter.

It was very pleasant in some ways, the life Melanctha Herbert now led with Rose and all the others. It was not always that Rose had to scold her.

There was not anybody of all these colored people, excepting only Rose, who ever meant much to Melanctha Herbert. But they all liked Melanctha, and the men all liked to see her do things, she was so game always to do anything anybody ever could do, and then she was good and sweet to do anything anybody ever wanted from her.

These were pleasant days then, in the hot southern negro sunshine, with many simple jokes and always wide abandonment of laughter. "Just look at that Melanctha there a running. Don't she just go like a bird when she is flying. Hey Melanctha there, I come and catch you, hey Melanctha, I put salt on your tail to catch you," and then the man would try to catch her, and he would fall full on the earth and roll in an agony of wide-mouthed shouting laughter. And this was the kind of way Rose always liked to have Melanctha do it, to be engaged to him, and to have a good warm nigger time with colored men, not to go about with that kind of white man, never could know how to act right, to any decent kind of girl they could ever get to be with them.

Rose, always more and more, liked Melanctha Herbert better. Rose often had to scold Melanctha Herbert, but that only made her like Melanctha better. And then Melanctha always listened to her, and always acted every way she could to please her. And then Rose was so sorry for Melanctha, when she was so blue sometimes, and wanted somebody should come and kill her.

And Melanctha Herbert clung to Rose in the hope that Rose could save her. Melanctha felt the power of Rose's selfish, decent kind of nature. It was so solid, simple, certain to her. Melanctha clung to Rose, she loved to

have her scold her, she always wanted to be with her. She always felt a solid safety in her; Rose always was, in her way, very good to let Melanctha be loving to her. Melanctha never had any way she could really be a trouble to her. Melanctha never had any way that she could ever get real power, to come close inside to her. Melanctha was always very humble to her. Melanctha was always ready to do anything Rose wanted from her. Melanctha needed badly to have Rose always willing to let Melanctha cling to her. Rose was a simple, sullen, selfish, black girl, but she had a solid power in her. Rose had strong the sense of decent conduct, she had strong the sense of decent comfort. Rose always knew very well what it was she wanted, and she knew very well what was the right way to do to get everything she wanted, and she never had any kind of trouble to perplex her. And so the subtle intelligent attractive half white girl Melanctha Herbert loved and did for, and demeaned herself in service to this coarse, decent, sullen, ordinary, black, childish Rose and now this unmoral promiscuous shiftless Rose was to be married to a good man of the negroes, while Melanctha Herbert with her white blood and attraction and her desire for a right position was perhaps never to be really regularly married. Sometimes the thought of how all her world was made filled the complex, desiring Melanctha with despair. She wondered often how she could go on living when she was so blue. Sometimes Melanctha thought she would just kill herself, for sometimes she thought this would be really the best thing for her to do.

Rose was now to be married to a decent good man of the negroes. His name was Sam Johnson, and he worked as a deck-hand on a coasting steamer, and he was very steady, and he got good wages.

Rose first met Sam Johnson at church, the same place where she had met Melanctha Herbert. Rose liked Sam when she saw him, she knew he was a good man and worked hard and got good wages, and Rose thought it would be very nice and very good now in her position to get really, regularly married.

Sam Johnson liked Rose very well and he always was



ready to do anything she wanted. Sam was a tall, square shouldered, decent, a serious, straightforward, simple, kindly, colored workman. They got on very well together, Sam and Rose, when they were married. Rose was lazy, but not dirty, and Sam was careful but not fussy. Sam was a kindly, simple, earnest, steady workman, and Rose had good common decent sense in her, of how to live regular, and not to have excitements, and to be saving so you could be always sure to have money, so as to have everything you wanted.

It was not very long that Rose knew Sam Johnson, before they were regularly married. Sometimes Sam went into the country with all the other young church people, and then he would be a great deal with Rose and with her Melanctha Herbert. Sam did not care much about Melanctha Herbert. He liked Rose's ways of doing, always better. Melanctha's mystery had no charm for Sam ever. Sam wanted a nice little house to come to when he was tired from his working, and a little baby all his own he could be good to. Sam Johnson was ready to marry as soon as ever Rose wanted he should do it. And so Sam Johnson and Rose one day had a grand real wedding and were married. Then they furnished completely, a little red brick house and then Sam went back to his work as deck hand on a coasting steamer.

Rose had often talked to Sam about how good Melanctha was and how much she always suffered. Sam Johnson never really cared about Melanctha Herbert, but he always did almost everything Rose ever wanted, and he was a gentle, kindly creature, and so he was very good to Rose's friend Melanctha. Melanctha Herbert knew very well Sam did not like her, and so she was very quiet, and always let Rose do the talking for her.

She only was very good to always help Rose, and to do anything she ever wanted from her, and to be very good and listen and be quiet whenever Sam had anything to say to her. Melanctha liked Sam Johnson, and all her life Melanctha loved and wanted good and kind and considerate people, and always Melanctha loved and wanted people to be gentle to her, and always she wanted to be regular, and to have peace and quiet

in her, and always Melanctha could only find new ways to be in trouble. And Melanctha needed badly to have Rose, to believe her, and to let her cling to her. Rose was the only steady thing Melanctha had to cling to and so Melanctha demeaned herself to be like a servant, to wait on, and always to be scolded, by this ordinary, sullen, black, stupid, childish woman.

Rose was always telling Sam he must be good to poor Melanctha. "You know Sam," Rose said very often to him, "You certainly had ought to be very good to poor Melanctha, she always do have so much trouble with her. You know Sam how I told you she had such a bad time always with that father, and he was awful mean to her always that awful black man, and he never took no kind of care ever to her, and he never helped her when her mother died so hard, that poor Melanctha. Melanctha's ma you know Sam, always was just real religious. One day Melanctha was real little, and she heard her ma say to her pa, it was awful sad to her, Melanctha had not been the one the Lord had took from them stead of the little brother who was dead in the house there from fever. That hurt Melanctha awful when she heard her ma say it. She never could feel it right, and I don't no ways blame Melanctha, Sam, for not feeling better to her ma always after, though Melanctha, just like always she is, always was real good to her ma after, when she was so sick, and died so hard, and nobody never to help Melanctha do it, and she just all alone to do everything without no help come to her no way, and that ugly awful black man she have for a father never all the time come near her. But that's always the way Melanctha is just doing Sam, the way I been telling to you. She always is being just so good to everybody and nobody ever there to thank her for it. I never did see nobody ever Sam, have such bad luck, seems to me always with them, like that poor Melanctha always has it, and she always so good with it, and never no murmur in her, and never no complaining from her, and just never saying nothing with it. You be real good to her Sam, now you hear me, now you and me is married right together. He certainly was an awful black man to her Sam, that father she had, acting always just like a brute to her and she so game and never to tell anybody



how it hurt her. And she so sweet and good always to do anything anybody ever can be wanting. I don't see Sam how some men can be to act so awful. I told you Sam, how once Melanctha broke her arm bad and she was so sick and it hurt her awful and he never would let no doctor come near to her and he do some things so awful to her, she don't never want to tell nobody how bad he hurt her. That's just the way Sam with Melanctha always, you never can know how bad it is, it hurts her. You hear me Sam, you always be real good to her now you and me is married right to each other."

And so Rose and Sam Johnson were regularly married, and Rose sat at home and bragged to all her friends how nice it was to be married really to a husband. Rose did not have Melanctha to live with her, now Rose was married. Melanctha was with Rose almost as much as ever but it was a little different now their being together.

Rose Johnson never asked Melanctha to live with her in the house, now Rose was married. Rose liked to have Melanctha come all the time to help her, Rose liked Melanctha to be almost always with her, but Rose was shrewd in her simple selfish nature, she did not ever think to ask Melanctha to live with her.

Rose was hard headed, she was decent, and she always knew what it was she needed. Rose needed Melanctha to be with her, she liked to have her help her, the quick, good Melanctha to do for the slow, lazy, selfish, black girl, but Rose could have Melanctha to do for her and she did not need her to live with her. Sam never asked Rose why she did not have her. Sam always took what Rose wanted should be done for Melanctha, as the right way he should act toward her. It could never come to Melanctha to ask Rose to let her. It never could come to Melanctha to think that Rose would ask her. It would never ever come to Melanctha to want it, if Rose should ask her, but Melanctha would have done it for the safety she always felt when she was near her. Melanctha Herbert wanted badly to be safe now, but this living with her, that, Rose would never give her. Rose had strong the sense for decent comfort, Rose had strong the sense for proper conduct, Rose had strong the sense

to get straight always what she wanted, and she always knew what was the best thing she needed, and always Rose got what she wanted. And so Rose had Melanctha Herbert always there to help her, and she sat and was lazy and she bragged and she complained a little and she told Melanctha how she ought to do, to get good what she wanted like she Rose always did it, and always Melanctha was doing everything Rose ever needed. "Don't you bother so, doing that Melanctha, I do it or Sam when he comes home to help me. Sure you don't mind lifting it Melanctha? You is very good Melanctha to do it, and when you go out Melanctha, you stop and get some rice to bring me to-morrow when you come in. Sure you won't forget Melanctha. I never see anybody like you Melanctha to always do things so nice for me." And then Melanctha would do some more for Rose, and then very late Melanctha would go home to the colored woman where she lived now.

And so though Melanctha still was so much with Rose Johnson, she had times when she could not stay there. Melanctha now could not really cling there. Rose had Sam, and Melanctha more and more lost the hold she had had there.

Melanctha Herbert began to feel she must begin again to look and see if she could find what it was she had always wanted. Now Rose Johnson could no longer help her.

And so Melanctha Herbert began once more to wander and with men Rose never thought it was right she should be with.

One day Melanctha had been very busy with the different kinds of ways she wandered. It was a pleasant late afternoon at the end of a long summer. Melanctha was walking along, and she was free and excited.

Melanctha had just parted from a white man and she had a bunch of flowers he had left with her. A young buck, a mulatto, passed by and snatched them from her. "It certainly is real sweet in you sister, to be giving me them pretty flowers," he said to her.

"I don't see no way it can make them sweeter to



have with you,” said Melanctha. “What one man gives, another man had certainly just as much good right to be taking.” “Keep your old flowers then, I certainly don’t never want to have them.” Melanctha Herbert laughed at him and took them. “No, I didn’t nohow think you really did want to have them. Thank you kindly mister, for them. I certainly always do admire to see a man always so kind of real polite to people.” The man laughed, “You ain’t nobody’s fool I can say for you, but you certainly are a damned pretty kind of girl, now I look at you. Want men to be polite to you? All right, I can love you, that’s real polite now, want to see me try it.” “I certainly ain’t got no time this evening just only left to thank you. I certainly got to be real busy now, but I certainly always will admire to see you.” The man tried to catch and stop her, Melanctha Herbert laughed and dodged so that he could not touch her. Melanctha went quickly down a side street near her and so the man for that time lost her.

For some days Melanctha did not see any more of her mulatto. One day Melanctha was with a white man and they saw him. The white man stopped to speak to him. Afterwards Melanctha left the white man and she then soon met him. Melanctha stopped to talk to him. Melanctha Herbert soon began to like him.

Jem Richards, the new man Melanctha had begun to know now, was a dashing kind of fellow, who had to do with fine horses and with racing. Sometimes Jem Richards would be betting and would be good and lucky, and be making lots of money. Sometimes Jem would be betting badly, and then he would not be having any money.

Jem Richards was a straight man. Jem Richards always knew that by and by he would win again and pay it, and so Jem mostly did win again, and then he always paid it.

Jem Richards was a man other men always trusted. Men gave him money when he lost all his, for they all knew Jem Richards would win again, and when he did win they knew, and they were right, that he would pay it. Melanctha Herbert all her life had always loved to be with horses. Melanctha liked it that Jem knew all about

fine horses. He was a reckless man was Jem Richards. He knew how to win out, and always all her life, Melanctha Herbert loved successful power. Melanctha Herbert always liked Jem Richards better. Things soon began to be very strong between them. Jem was more game even than Melanctha. Jem always had known what it was to have real wisdom. Jem had always all his life been understanding.

Jem Richards made Melanctha Herbert come fast with him. He never gave her any time with waiting. Soon Melanctha always had Jem with her. Melanctha did not want anything better. Now in Jem Richards, Melanctha found everything she had ever needed to content her. Melanctha was now less and less with Rose Johnson. Rose did not think much of the way Melanctha now was going. Jem Richards was all right, only Melanctha never had no sense of the right kind of way she should be doing. Rose often was telling Sam now, she did not like the fast way Melanctha was going. Rose told it to Sam, and to all the girls and men, when she saw them. But Rose was nothing just then to Melanctha. Melanctha Herbert now only needed Jem Richards to be with her.

And things were always getting stronger between Jem Richards and Melanctha Herbert. Jem Richards began to talk now as if he wanted to get married to her. Jem was deep in his love now for her. And as for Melanctha, Jem was all the world now to her. And so Jem gave her a ring, like white folks, to show he was engaged to her, and would by and by be married to her. And Melanctha was filled full with joy to have Jem so good to her. Melanctha always loved to go with Jem to the races. Jem had been lucky lately with his betting, and he had a swell turn-out to drive in, and Melanctha looked very handsome there beside him.

Melanctha was very proud to have Jem Richards want her. Melanctha loved it the way Jem knew how to do it. Melanctha loved Jem and loved that he should want her. She loved it too, that he wanted to be married to her. Jem Richards was a straight decent man, whom other men always looked up to and trusted. Melanctha needed badly a man to content her.



Melanctha's joy made her foolish. Melanctha told everybody about how Jem Richards, that swell man who owned all those fine horses and was so game, nothing ever scared him, was engaged to be married to her, and that was the ring he gave her.

Melanctha let out her joy very often to Rose Johnson. Melanctha had begun again now to go there. Melanctha's love for Jem made her foolish. Melanctha had to have some one always now to talk to and so she went often to Rose Johnson.

Melanctha put all herself into Jem Richards. She was mad and foolish in the joy she had there.

Rose never liked the way Melanctha did it. "No Sam I don't say never Melanctha ain't engaged to Jem Richards the way she always says it, and Jem he is all right for that kind of man he is, though he do think himself so smart and like he owns the earth and everything he can get with it, and he sure gave Melanctha a ring like he really meant he should be married right soon with it, only Sam, I don't ever like it the way Melanctha is going. When she is engaged to him Sam, she ain't not right to take on so excited. That ain't no decent kind of a way a girl ever should be acting. There ain't no kind of a man going stand that, not like I knows men Sam, and I sure does know them. I knows them white and I knows them colored, for I was raised by white folks, and they don't none of them like a girl to act so. That's all right to be so when you is just only loving, but it ain't no ways right to be acting so when you is engaged to him, and when he says, all right he get really regularly married to you. You see Sam I am right like I am always and I knows it. Jem Richards, he ain't going to the last to get real married, not if I knows it right, the way Melanctha now is acting to him. Rings or anything ain't nothing to them, and they don't never do no good for them, when a girl acts foolish like Melanctha always now is acting. I certainly will be right sorry Sam, if Melanctha has real bad trouble come now to her, but I certainly don't no ways like it Sam the kind of way Melanctha is acting to him. I don't never say nothing to her Sam. I just listens to what she is saying always, and I thinks it out like I am

telling to you Sam but I don't never say nothing no more now to Melanctha. Melanctha didn't say nothing to me about that Jem Richards till she was all like finished with him, and I never did like it Sam, much, the way she was acting, not coming here never when she first ran with those men and met him. And I didn't never say nothing to her, Sam, about it, and it ain't nothing ever to me, only I don't never no more want to say nothing to her, so I just listens to what she got to tell like she wants it. No Sam, I don't never want to say nothing to her. Melanctha just got to go her own way, not as I want to see her have bad trouble ever come hard to her, only it ain't in me never Sam, after Melanctha did so, ever to say nothing more to her how she should be acting. You just see Sam like I tell you, what way Jem Richards will act to her, you see Sam I just am right like I always am when I knows it." Melanctha Herbert never thought she could ever again be in trouble. Melanctha's joy had made her foolish. And now Jem Richards had some bad trouble with his betting. Melanctha sometimes felt now when she was with him that there was something wrong inside him. Melanctha knew he had had trouble with his betting but Melanctha never felt that that could make any difference to them.

Melanctha once had told Jem, sure he knew she always would love to be with him, if he was in jail or only just a beggar. Now Melanctha said to him, "Sure you know Jem that it don't never make any kind of difference you're having any kind of trouble, you just try me Jem and be game, don't look so worried to me. Jem sure I know you love me like I love you always, and its all I ever could be wanting Jem to me, just your wanting me always to be with you. I get married Jem to you soon ever as you can want me, if you once say it Jem to me. It ain't nothing to me ever, anything like having any money Jem, why you look so worried to me."

Melanctha Herbert's love had surely made her mad and foolish. She thrust it always deep into Jem Richards and now that he had trouble with his betting, Jem had no way that he ever wanted to be made to feel it. Jem Richards never could want to marry any girl while he had trouble. That was no way a man like him should do it. Melanctha's love had made her mad and foolish, she



should be silent now and let him do it. Jem Richards was not a kind of man to want a woman to be strong to him, when he was in trouble with his betting. That was not the kind of a time when a man like him needed to have it.

Melanctha needed so badly to have it, this love which she had always wanted, she did not know what she should do to save it. Melanctha saw now, Jem Richards always had something wrong inside him. Melanctha soon dared not ask him. Jem was busy now, he had to sell things and see men to raise money. Jem could not meet Melanctha now so often.

It was lucky for Melanctha Herbert that Rose Johnson was coming now to have her baby. It had always been understood between them, Rose should come and stay then in the house where Melanctha lived with an old colored woman, so that Rose could have the Doctor from the hospital near by to help her, and Melanctha there to take care of her the way Melanctha always used to do it.

Melanctha was very good now to Rose Johnson. Melanctha did everything that any woman could, she tended Rose, and she was patient, submissive, soothing and untiring, while the sullen, childish, cowardly, black Rosie grumbled, and fussed, and howled, and made herself to be an abomination and like a simple beast. All this time Melanctha was always being every now and then with Jem Richards. Melanctha was beginning to be stronger with Jem Richards. Melanctha was never so strong and sweet and in her nature as when she was deep in trouble, when she was fighting so with all she had, she could not do any foolish thing with her nature.

Always now Melanctha Herbert came back again to be nearer to Rose Johnson. Always now Melanctha would tell all about her troubles to Rose Johnson. Rose had begun now a little again to advise her.

Melanctha always told Rose now about the talks she had with Jem Richards, talks where they neither of them liked very well what the other one was saying.

Melanctha did not know what it was Jem Richards wanted. All Melanctha knew was, he did not like it when she wanted to be good friends and get really married, and

then when Melanctha would say, “all right, I never wear your ring no more Jem, we ain’t not any more to meet ever like we ever going to get really regular married,” then Jem did not like it either. What was it Jem Richards really wanted?

Melanctha stopped wearing Jem’s ring on her finger. Poor Melanctha, she wore it on a string she tied around her neck so that she could always feel it, but Melanctha was strong now with Jem Richards, and he never saw it. And sometimes Jem seemed to be awful sorry for it, and sometimes he seemed kind of glad of it. Melanctha never could make out really what it was Jem Richards wanted.

There was no other woman yet to Jem, that Melanctha knew, and so she always trusted that Jem would come back to her, deep in his love, the way once he had had it and had made all the world like she once had never believed anybody could really make it. But Jem Richards was more game than Melanctha Herbert. He knew how to fight to win out, better. Melanctha really had already lost it, in not keeping quiet and waiting for Jem to do it.

Jem Richards was not yet having better luck in his betting. He never before had had such a long time without some good coming to him in his betting.

Sometimes Jem talked as if he wanted to go off on a trip somewhere and try some other place for luck with his betting. Jem Richards never talked as if he wanted to take Melanctha with him.

And so Melanctha sometimes was really trusting, and sometimes she was all sick inside her with her doubting. What was it Jem really wanted to do with her? He did not have any other woman, in that Melanctha could be really trusting, and when she said no to him, no she never would come near him, now he did not want to have her, then Jem would change and swear, yes sure he did want her, now and always right here near him, but he never now any more said he wanted to be married soon to her. But then Jem Richards never would marry a girl, he said that very often, when he was in this kind of trouble, and now he did not see any way he could get out of his trouble. But Melanctha ought to wear his ring,



sure she knew he never had loved any kind of woman like he loved her. Melanctha would wear the ring a little while, and then they would have some more trouble, and then she would say to him, no she certainly never would any more wear anything he gave her, and then she would wear it on the string so nobody could see it but she could always feel it on her.

Poor Melanctha, surely her love had made her mad and foolish.

And now Melanctha needed always more and more to be with Rose Johnson, and Rose had commenced again to advise her, but Rose could not help her. There was no way now that anybody could advise her. The time when Melanctha could have changed it with Jem Richards was now all past for her. Rose knew it, and Melanctha too, she knew it, and it almost killed her to let herself believe it.

The only comfort Melanctha ever had now was waiting on Rose till she was so tired she could hardly stand it. Always Melanctha did everything Rose ever wanted. Sam Johnson began now to be very gentle and a little tender to Melanctha. She was so good to Rose and Sam was so glad to have her there to help Rose and to do things and to be a comfort to her.

Rose had a hard time to bring her baby to its birth and Melanctha did everything that any woman could. The baby though it was healthy after it was born did not live long. Rose Johnson was careless and negligent and selfish and when Melanctha had to leave for a few days the baby died. Rose Johnson had liked her baby well enough and perhaps she just forgot it for a while, anyway the child was dead and Rose and Sam were very sorry, but then these things came so often in the negro world in Bridgepoint that they neither of them thought about it very long. When Rose had become strong again she went back to her house with Sam. And Sam Johnson was always now very gentle and kind and good to Melanctha who had been so good to Rose in her bad trouble.

Melanctha Herbert's troubles with Jem Richards were never getting any better. Jem always now had less and

less time to be with her. When Jem was with Melanctha now he was good enough to her. Jem Richards was worried with his betting. Never since Jem had first begun to make a living had he ever had so much trouble for such a long time together with his betting. Jem Richards was good enough now to Melanctha but he had not much strength to give her. Melanctha could never any more now make him quarrel with her. Melanctha never now could complain of his treatment of her, for surely, he said it always by his actions to her, surely she must know how a man was when he had trouble on his mind with trying to make things go a little better.

Sometimes Jem and Melanctha had long talks when they neither of them liked very well what the other one was saying, but mostly now Melanctha could not make Jem Richards quarrel with her, and more and more, Melanctha could not find any way to make it right to blame him for the trouble she now always had inside her. Jem was good to her, and she knew, for he told her, that he had trouble all the time now with his betting. Melanctha knew very well that for her it was all wrong inside Jem Richards, but Melanctha had now no way that she could really reach him.

Things between Melanctha and Jem Richards were now never getting any better. Melanctha now more and more needed to be with Rose Johnson. Rose still liked to have Melanctha come to her house and do things for her, and Rose liked to grumble to her and to scold her and to tell Melanctha what was the way Melanctha always should be doing so she could make things come out better and not always be so much in trouble. Sam Johnson in these days was always very good and gentle to Melanctha. Sam was now beginning to be very sorry for her.

Jem Richards never made things any better for Melanctha. Often Jem would talk so as to make Melanctha almost certain that he never any more wanted to have her. Then Melanctha would get very blue, and she would say to Rose, sure she would kill herself, for that certainly now was the best way she could do.

Rose Johnson never saw it the least bit that way.



“I don’t see Melanctha why you should talk like you would kill yourself just because you’re blue. I’d never kill myself Melanctha cause I was blue. I’d maybe kill somebody else but I’d never kill myself. If I ever killed myself, Melanctha it’d be by accident and if I ever killed myself by accident, Melanctha, I’d be awful sorry. And that certainly is the way you should feel it Melanctha, now you hear me, not just talking foolish like you always do. It certainly is only your way just always being foolish makes you all that trouble to come to you always now, Melanctha, and I certainly right well knows that. You certainly never can learn no way Melanctha ever with all I certainly been telling to you, ever since I know you good, that it ain’t never no way like you do always is the right way you be acting ever and talking, the way I certainly always have seen you do so Melanctha always. I certainly am right Melanctha about them ways you have to do it, and I knows it; but you certainly never can noways learn to act right Melanctha, I certainly do know that, I certainly do my best Melanctha to help you with it only you certainly never do act right Melanctha, not to nobody ever, I can see it. You never act right by me Melanctha no more than by everybody. I never say nothing to you Melanctha when you do so, for I certainly never do like it when I just got to say it to you, but you just certainly done with that Jem Richards you always say wanted real bad to be married to you, just like I always said to Sam you certainly was going to do it. And I certainly am real kind of sorry like for you Melanctha, but you certainly had ought to have come to see me to talk to you, when you first was engaged to him so I could show you, and now you got all this trouble come to you Melanctha like I certainly know you always catch it. It certainly ain’t never Melanctha I ain’t real sorry to see trouble come so hard to you, but I certainly can see Melanctha it all is always just the way you always be having it in you not never to do right. And now you always talk like you just kill yourself because you are so blue, that certainly never is Melanctha, no kind of a way for any decent kind of a girl to do.”

Rose had begun to be strong now to scold Melanctha and she was impatient very often with her, but Rose could

now never any more be a help to her. Melanctha Herbert never could know now what it was right she should do. Melanctha always wanted to have Jem Richards with her and now he never seemed to want her, and what could Melanctha do. Surely she was right now when she said she would just kill herself, for that was the only way now she could do.

Sam Johnson always, more and more, was good and gentle to Melanctha. Poor Melanctha, she was so good and sweet to do anything anybody ever wanted, and Melanctha always liked it if she could have peace and quiet, and always she could only find new ways to be in trouble. Sam often said this now to Rose about Melanctha.

“I certainly don’t never want Sam to say bad things about Melanctha, for she certainly always do have most awful kind of trouble come hard to her, but I never can say I like it real right Sam the way Melanctha always has to do it. Its now just the same with her like it is always she has got to do it, now the way she is with that Jem Richards. He certainly now don’t never want to have her but Melanctha she ain’t got no right kind of spirit. No Sam I don’t never like the way any more Melanctha is acting to him, and then Sam, she ain’t never real right honest, the way she always should do it. She certainly just don’t kind of never Sam tell right what way she is doing with it. I don’t never like to say nothing Sam no more to her about the way she always has to be acting. She always say, yes all right Rose, I do the way you say it, and then Sam she don’t never noways do it. She certainly is right sweet and good, Sam, is Melanctha, nobody ever can hear me say she ain’t always ready to do things for everybody anyway she ever can see to do it, only Sam some ways she never does act real right ever, and some ways, Sam, she ain’t ever real honest with it. And Sam sometimes I hear awful kind of things she been doing, some girls know about her how she does it, and sometimes they tell me what kind of ways she has to do it, and Sam it certainly do seem to me like more and more I certainly am awful afraid Melanctha never will come to any good. And then Sam, sometimes, you hear it, she always talk like she kill herself all the time she



is so blue, and Sam that certainly never is no kind of way any decent girl ever had ought to do. You see Sam, how I am right like I always is when I knows it. You just be careful, Sam, now you hear me, you be careful Sam sure, I tell you, Melanctha more and more I see her I certainly do feel Melanctha no way is really honest. You be careful, Sam now, like I tell you, for I knows it, now you hear to me, Sam, what I tell you, for I certainly always is right, Sam, when I knows it.”

At first Sam tried a little to defend Melanctha, and Sam always was good and gentle to her, and Sam liked the ways Melanctha had to be quiet to him, and to always listen as if she was learning, when she was there and heard him talking, and then Sam liked the sweet way she always did everything so nicely for him; but Sam never liked to fight with anybody ever, and surely Rose knew best about Melanctha and anyway Sam never did really care much about Melanctha. Her mystery never had had any interest for him. Sam liked it that she was sweet to him and that she always did everything Rose ever wanted that she should be doing. But Melanctha never would be important to him. All Sam ever wanted was to have a little house and to live regular and to work hard and to come home to his dinner, when he was tired with his working and by and by he wanted to have some children all his own to be good to, and so Sam was real sorry for Melanctha, she was so good and so sweet always to them, and Jem Richards was a bad man to behave so to her, but that was always the way a girl got it when she liked that kind of fast fellow.

Anyhow Melanctha was Rose’s friend, and Sam never cared to have anything to do with the kind of trouble always came to women, when they wanted to have men, who never could know how to behave good and steady to their women.

And so Sam never said much to Rose about Melanctha. Sam was always very gentle to her, but now he began less and less to see her. Soon Melanctha never came any more to the house to see Rose and Sam never asked Rose anything about her.

Melanctha Herbert was beginning now to come less

and less to the house to be with Rose Johnson. This was because Rose seemed always less and less now to want her, and Rose would not let Melanctha now do things for her. Melanctha was always humble to her and Melanctha always wanted in every way she could to do things for her. Rose said no, she guessed she do that herself like she likes to have it better. Melanctha is real good to stay so long to help her, but Rose guessed perhaps Melanctha better go home now, Rose don’t need nobody to help her now, she is feeling real strong, not like just after she had all that trouble with the baby, and then Sam, when he comes home for his dinner he likes it when Rose is all alone there just to give him his dinner. Sam always is so tired now, like he always is in the summer, so many people always on the steamer, and they make so much work so Sam is real tired now, and he likes just to eat his dinner and never have people in the house to be a trouble to him.

Each day Rose treated Melanctha more and more as if she never wanted Melanctha any more to come there to the house to see her. Melanctha dared not ask Rose why she acted in this way to her. Melanctha badly needed to have Rose always there to save her. Melanctha wanted badly to cling to her and Rose had always been so solid for her. Melanctha did not dare to ask Rose if she now no longer wanted her to come and see her.

Melanctha now never any more had Sam to be gentle to her. Rose always sent Melanctha away from her before it was time for Sam to come home to her. One day Melanctha had stayed a little longer, for Rose that day had been good to let Melanctha begin to do things for her. Melanctha then left her and Melanctha met Sam Johnson who stopped a minute to speak kindly to her.

The next day Rose Johnson would not let Melanctha come in to her. Rose stood on the steps, and there she told Melanctha what she thought now of her.

“I guess Melanctha it certainly ain’t no ways right for you to come here no more just to see me. I certainly don’t Melanctha no ways like to be a trouble to you. I certainly think Melanctha I get along better now when I don’t have nobody like you are, always here to help



me, and Sam he do so good now with his working, he pay a little girl something to come every day to help me. I certainly do think Melanctha I don't never want you no more to come here just to see me." "Why Rose, what I ever done to you, I certainly don't think you is right Rose to be so bad now to me." "I certainly don't know ways Melanctha Herbert think you got any right ever to be complaining the way I been acting to you. I certainly never do think Melanctha Herbert, you hear me, nobody ever been more patient to you than I always been to like you, only Melanctha, I hear more things now so awful bad about you, everybody always is telling to me what kind of a way you always have been doing so much, and me always so good to you, and you never no ways, knowing how to be honest to me. No Melanctha it ain't ever in me, not to want you to have good luck come to you, and I like it real well Melanctha when you some time learn how to act the way it is decent and right for a girl to be doing, but I don't know ways ever like it the kind of things everybody tell me now about you. No Melanctha, I can't never any more trust you. I certainly am real sorry to have never any more to see you, but there ain't no other way, I ever can be acting to you. That's all I ever got any more to say to you now Melanctha." "But Rose, deed; I certainly don't know, no more than the dead, nothing I ever done to make you act so to me. Anybody say anything bad about me Rose, to you, they just a pack of liars to you, they certainly is Rose, I tell you true. I certainly never done nothing I ever been ashamed to tell you. Why you act so bad to me Rose. Sam he certainly don't think ever like you do, and Rose I always do everything I can, you ever want me to do for you." "It ain't never no use standing there talking, Melanctha Herbert. I just can tell it to you, and Sam, he don't know nothing about women ever the way they can be acting. I certainly am very sorry Melanctha, to have to act so now to you, but I certainly can't do no other way with you, when you do things always so bad, and everybody is talking so about you. It ain't no use to you to stand there and say it different to me Melanctha. I certainly am always right Melanctha Herbert, the way I certainly always have been when I knows it, to you. No Melanctha, it just is, you never can have no kind of

a way to act right, the way a decent girl has to do, and I done my best always to be telling it to you Melanctha Herbert, but it don't never do no good to tell nobody how to act right; they certainly never can learn when they ain't got no sense right to know it, and you never have no sense right Melanctha to be honest, and I ain't never wishing no harm to you ever Melanctha Herbert, only I don't never want any more to see you come here. I just say to you now, like I always been saying to you, you don't know never the right way, any kind of decent girl has to be acting, and so Melanctha Herbert, me and Sam, we don't never any more want you to be setting your foot in my house here Melanctha Herbert, I just tell you. And so you just go along now, Melanctha Herbert, you hear me, and I don't never wish no harm to come to you."

Rose Johnson went into her house and closed the door behind her. Melanctha stood like one dazed, she did not know how to bear this blow that almost killed her. Slowly then Melanctha went away without even turning to look behind her.

Melanctha Herbert was all sore and bruised inside her. Melanctha had needed Rose always to believe her, Melanctha needed Rose always to let her cling to her, Melanctha wanted badly to have somebody who could make her always feel a little safe inside her, and now Rose had sent her from her. Melanctha wanted Rose more than she had ever wanted all the others. Rose always was so simple, solid, decent, for her. And now Rose had cast her from her. Melanctha was lost, and all the world went whirling in a mad weary dance around her.

Melanctha Herbert never had any strength alone ever to feel safe inside her. And now Rose Johnson had cast her from her, and Melanctha could never any more be near her. Melanctha Herbert knew now, way inside her, that she was lost, and nothing any more could ever help her.

Melanctha went that night to meet Jem Richards who had promised to be at the old place to meet her. Jem Richards was absent in his manner to her. By and by he began to talk to her, about the trip he was going to take



soon, to see if he could get some luck back in his betting. Melanctha trembled, was Jem too now going to leave her. Jem Richards talked some more then to her, about the bad luck he always had now, and how he needed to go away to see if he could make it come out any better.

Then Jem stopped, and then he looked straight at Melanctha.

“Tell me Melanctha right and true, you don’t care really nothing more about me now Melanctha,” he said to her.

“Why you ask me that, Jem Richards,” said Melanctha.

“Why I ask you that Melanctha, God Almighty, because I just don’t give a damn now for you any more Melanctha. That the reason I was asking.”

Melanctha never could have for this an answer. Jem Richards waited and then he went away and left her. Melanctha Herbert never again saw Jem Richards. Melanctha never again saw Rose Johnson, and it was hard to Melanctha never any more to see her. Rose Johnson had worked in to be the deepest of all Melanctha’s emotions.

“No, I don’t never see Melanctha Herbert no more now,” Rose would say to anybody who asked her about Melanctha. “No, Melanctha she never comes here no more now, after we had all that trouble with her acting so bad with them kind of men she liked so much to be with. She don’t never come to no good Melanctha Herbert don’t, and me and Sam don’t want no more to see her. She didn’t do right ever the way I told her. Melanctha just wouldn’t, and I always said it to her, if she don’t be more kind of careful, the way she always had to be acting, I never did want no more she should come here in my house no more to see me. I ain’t no ways ever against any girl having any kind of a way, to have a good time like she wants it, but not that kind of a way Melanctha always had to do it. I expect some day Melanctha kill herself, when she act so bad like she do always, and then she got so awful blue. Melanctha always says that’s the only way she ever can think it a easy way for her to do. No, I always am real sorry for Melanctha, she never was

no just common kind of nigger, but she don’t never know not with all the time I always was telling it to her, no she never no way could learn, what was the right way she should do. I certainly don’t never want no kind of harm to come bad to Melanctha, but I certainly do think she will most kill herself some time, the way she always say it would be easy way for her to do. I never see nobody ever could be so awful blue.”

But Melanctha Herbert never really killed herself because she was so blue, though often she thought this would be really the best way for her to do. Melanctha never killed herself, she only got a bad fever and went into the hospital where they took good care of her and cured her.

When Melanctha was well again, she took a place and began to work and to live regular. Then Melanctha got very sick again; she began to cough and sweat and be so weak she could not stand to do her work.

Melanctha went back to the hospital, and there the Doctor told her she had the consumption, and before long she would surely die. They sent her where she would be taken care of, a home for poor consumptives, and there Melanctha stayed until she died.

FINIS

ABOUT THE TEXT

I reprint Gertrude Stein’s *Melanctha* here as a celebration of its 100th Anniversary. First self-published in 1909 with two other stories as part of the *Three Lives* collection, *Melanctha* perhaps above anything else Stein wrote, demands her inclusion with other great American modern writers, in any serious study. Yet, her legacy seems primarily as a social figure, matron of the Lost Generation, while female studies of this period focus more on late Realism—on the visions that Stein dedicated her career toward undermining—and Anthologies tend to overlook her work.



This past summer, when I had the opportunity to teach The American Short Story at Northeastern University (an opportunity I receive about once a year), I decided to focus the course on Literary Representation of Otherness, exploring the influence of Post-Colonial ideas across the American literary spectrum. We started with Social Otherness, reading “Daisy Miller” and “Paul’s Case,” but race, of course, was a major component of American representation. In the third week, I assigned Hemingway’s “Indian Camp,” Chopin’s “Desiree’s Baby,” and Stein’s *Melanctha*.

(The course also included Faulkner’s “The Bear,” Ellison’s “A Party Down at the Square,” Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” and “This Morning, This Evening, So Soon,” Hurston’s “Sweat,” Kerouac’s *The Subterraneans*, O’Connor’s “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” Díaz’s “Ysrael,” and Alexie’s “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven.”)

I had not before taught *Melanctha*, though I suspected my students would have a very difficult time accepting the story after a few pages if I did not prepare them, so I merely announced that I want the reader to resist the initial reaction that this text is racist, to not make a determination until completing the story. 9/10 of my students returned to tell me how offensive they thought this text to be.

Critic Odine Le Blanc tended toward agreeing with my students, saying of the story:

As progressive as Stein’s selection of an African-American setting was in the early twentieth century, her language still carries obvious and marked racism. Her descriptions of the characters, in particular, betray her prejudices: Rose Johnson has “the simple, promiscuous unmorality of the black people”; several characters are identified by their proximity to “the wide abandoned laughter that gives the broad glow to negro sunshine.” ... [In] Stein’s effort to make use of William James’s theories of basic personality types, she assumes connections among racial heritage, skin color,

and supposedly inborn character traits. In her description of Jane Harden, for example, Stein writes, “she had much white blood and that made her see clear, she liked drinking and that made her reckless. Her white blood was strong in her and she had grit and endurance and a vital courage.”

While Stein does not back away from using clearly Racist language as a matter of introducing her characters, her choices have a specific utility in complicating the themes and perceptions of the story in a manner much more rewarding than if Stein had censored herself. Just in the context of my syllabus, I happen to find “Desiree’s Baby” *much* more problematic specifically because the Narrator writes so objectively. There is no voice against Racism in Chopin’s story. Because her concept of identity is shattered, because she believes--despite all physical evidence--that she has black blood in her, Desiree disappears forever “among the reeds and willows that grew thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou; and she did not come back again.” An open dialogue about Race is not proposed in the story, but it is treated as a *whodunit*, whose “secret shame” caused this situation. That Armand is proven to be mulatto is a surprise ending in the tradition of O. Henry, and the message seems not to be that Armand should have loved despite of Race, but that it’s Armand’s *fault*.

When considering the question of Racism in *Melanctha*, I think it’s particularly important to consider specific contemporary reactions to the story. While it’s easy to resist such an idea today, Stein’s treatment of an African-American cast in this story was groundbreaking. Short of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (which is hardly a compelling construction of character) and Jim in *Huck Finn*, African-American characters simply were not important in the writings of white authors, while African-American authors were not yet read. Richard Wright, for instance, championed Stein’s story, citing it as one of his major influences, and reading it to large audiences of black workingmen. While we will of course apply our own values and culture to our reading of *Melanctha*, should we not also consider the context of its time? And so, I ask



if, considering that the text was not intended nor received in its time as Racist, must we receive it as Racist? If we force ourselves to read the text denying to ourselves any notion of Racism, how does that affect our reading? The way that the characters speak seems extremely problematic here when we consider the question of Racism. Absolutely, Gertrude Stein failed here, revealing somewhat of a tin ear for the Baltimore dialect. Anyone who has known a person from Baltimore (or, failing that, watched an episode of *The Wire*) knows the accent, as distinct as Boston's. Stein thought a certain musicality to this language that she attempted (and, not to belabor the point, failed) to capture. However, while it seems natural to assume the narrator also to be a black character (and some of my students even focused on the narrator when they cried Racism), and for the narrative style to be further evidence of Stein's racial assumptions, it is in fact ourselves who assume the narrator to be black and uneducated, because I suppose the narrative uses heavy repetition, short paragraphs, and simple, straightforward language. For example, rather than using the elaborate, descriptive phrases we have come to expect from a "serious" writer today, she uses a series of adjectives:

Melanctha Herbert who was Rose Johnson's friend, did everything that any woman could. She tended Rose, and she was patient, submissive, soothing, and untiring, while the sullen, childish, cowardly, *black* Rosie grumbled and fussed and howled and made herself to be an abomination and like a simple beast.

Adjectives, by their nature, are subjective. We all have a similar idea of what *childish* means, or what *patient* means, but within these definitions, we have ideas and expectations of what type of behavior is childish or patient that are our own. Color, on the other hand, such as *black* (which I emphasize in the above paragraph), as definition, is objective because the word doubles as a noun. *Black* is one thing, a color--the color of this font, and we all know and understand what *black* means. By including the word in the description of Rosie, however,

black seems to acquire the other properties in the list--that to be *black* means to also be sullen, childish, and cowardly, a *simple beast* and an *abomination* (90). And, as readers of the 21st Century, if we think Stein is stating these adjectives as universal characteristics of *black*, we can react very harshly, very quickly. But Stein aims at two very complex purposes with her use of repetition, which (it must be pointed out) is modeled on Biblical verse (the repetition in the Creation story of Genesis, for example, which we begin to realize around Stein's time, repeats because the story is an amalgamation of multiple voices, multiple perspectives, creating not just that signature repetition, but also conflicts and discrepancies within the text).

With the repetition, Stein creates points of comparisons between characters. Both Rose Johnson and James Herbert are prominently described as *black*; but while Rose is *cowardly* here, James is introduced as *angry*, two adjectives that are in contrast with one another and explicate a lack of universality as it relates to color. With the repetition, Stein tends to introduce the story by establishing expectations (for example, establish the expectations of Rose's and Melanctha's behaviors before telling the story of the death of Rose's baby). After the paragraph that tells briefly the story of the baby's death, the description of Rose changes slightly:

Rose Johnson was a real black, tall, well built, sullen, stupid, childlike, good looking negress. She laughed when she was happy and grumbled and was sullen with everything that troubled.

First, *black* is no longer the last adjective in the list, so it no longer receives the other adjectives as characteristics of blackness. (**Q: How do we read the adverb *real* in terms of the color *black*, as there is no qualitative measure of blackness?**) Her physical description changes, as she is no longer a *simple beast* and an *abomination*, but now has features that are attractive--tall, well built, and good looking. She is no longer cowardly--as she was in child birth--but she is now *stupid*, perhaps as a narrative reaction to allowing



her healthy child to die. The important marker, here, is *sullen*: She is, in a general state, *repressed*. Though she can sometimes be happy, the sullen quality is prominent, caused by a troubled life. We leave Rose for awhile to develop the back story of Melanctha, but we revisit the birth of the baby toward the end of the story, as Stein has attempted to fully develop Rose as a friend and foil to Melanctha, and now the descriptions change:

Rose had a hard time to bring her baby to its birth and Melanctha did everything that any woman could.

The baby though it was healthy after it was born did not live long. Rose Johnson was careless and negligent and selfish and when Melanctha had to leave for a few days the baby died. Rose Johnson had liked her baby well enough and perhaps she just forgot it for a while, anyway the child was dead and Rose and Sam were very sorry, but then these things came so often in the negro world in Bridgepoint that they neither of them thought about it very long.

Rose's difficult delivery is now expressed in Universal, and more compassionate, terms—we're not intruding on a scene and having an initial impression of Rose as a beast and abomination because, since that *first impression*, we have seen her beauty and we have seen her growth and strength for her melancholy friend. We still very much dislike her for the baby's death—of which she seems clearly to blame—but

it's no longer a Racial act. We know that Rose is not always careless and selfish, and that this was a mistake, so that we can allow that she is sorry and consider her forgiveness. Compared with neo-natal care received by white people—consider Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," for instance—Rose has very little support; this becomes a social issue of black infant mortality, which is so common at this time, not for the carelessness of women like Rose, but for the lack of support. In a story of black-and-white, contrast is very important throughout, as Stein seems to be developing a theme of nurture (Rose's white upbringing) versus nature (Melanctha's white blood). White blood is almost always introduced as positive (such as Jane's clear vision) but proven to lack any meaning. Jane, I would posit, does not see clearly, and is blinded by her jealousies and pettiness, causing her to gossip about Melanctha in a very damaging way, a way that its been pointed out creates a comparison between Melanctha and Daisy Miller.

(Note: Stein still carries some marked instances of prejudice in her writing, perhaps as a product of her subscription to the theory of basic personality types and character traits present within specific subsets of society. I do not want to ignore nor apologize for phrases like "the simple, promiscuous unmorality of the black people," but at the same time, such phrases, I think, are issued to raise discussions about expectations, and to allow debate of whether Rose's promiscuity is a black or a Universal characteristic that men and women struggle to outgrow.)



Ghost, continued from 41

would necessarily be required to take the most abuse? The *eyes*, certainly. Please, dear general reader, as a last indulgence (if you're still here), reread those two short passages from Kafka and Kierkegaard I started out with. Isn't it *clear*? Don't those cries come straight from the eyes? However contradictory the coroner's report—whether he pronounces Consumption or Loneliness or Suicide to be the cause of death—isn't it plain how the true artist-seer actually dies? ... I say that the true artist-seer, the heavenly fool who can and does produce beauty, is mainly dazzled to death by his own scruples, the blinding shapes and colors of his own sacred human conscience. (105)

Buddy later contradicts his definition of the artist as a "heavenly fool," with perhaps a Kierkegaardian slip of his pen, by relating Seymour's epiphany that "there are no fools" (136). No longer foolish, can the artist-seer be dazzled to death? Does he not have more control over his perception than Buddy allows in his analysis? Buddy's explanation may ultimately win out, but it also demands further scrutiny. (Besides, "Bananafish" is far too interesting to ignore just because Buddy finds it flawed.)

As a seer who finds God in "the queerest imaginable places" (108), such as the Fat Lady and Muriel Fedder, Seymour strives (*strains?*) for an unattainable perfection. Though Zooley, in "Zooley," damns Seymour for indoctrinating him with "The Four Great Vows" (104–105), which defies the notion of eternity as an excuse to settle for less than perfection, he can't not say them each day. Zooley does not curse Seymour for misleading him, but for teaching him too completely. Haunted by Seymour, Zooley subconsciously strives for perfection, including a perfect detachment in opposition to his nature: "If you don't realize that the only thing that counts in the religious life is detachment, I don't see how you'll ever even move an *inch*. Detachment, buddy, and only detachment. Desirelessness. 'Cessation from all hankerings.' It's this business of desiring, if you want to

know the goddam truth, that makes an actor in the first place" (198). To find God in every Fat Lady, the Glasses must avoid discrimination; as poets and actors, however, they must essentially discriminate. These contradictions, as stated by the De Caussade quote on Seymour's door, are more necessary than the Jesus Prayer to communicate with God: "God instructs the heart, not by ideas but by pains and contradictions" (Zooley 178). Franny and Zooley wrestle with this contradiction in *Franny and Zooley*, as does Seymour.

In the diary entries read by Buddy in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," Seymour offers his theory of indiscrimination against Mrs. Fedder's psychoanalyst's diagnosis of a perfection complex:

He seemed to feel that I have a perfection complex of some kind. Much talk from him, and quite intelligent, on the virtues of living the imperfect life, of accepting one's own and others' weaknesses. I agree with him, but only in theory. I'll champion indiscrimination till doomsday, on the grounds that it leads to health and a kind of very real, enviable happiness. *Followed purely*, it's the way of the Tao, and undoubtedly the highest way. But for a discriminating man to achieve this it would mean that he would have to dispossess himself of poetry, go *beyond* poetry. That is, he couldn't possibly learn to drive himself to *like* bad poetry in the abstract, let alone equate it with good poetry. He would have to drop poetry altogether. I said it would be no easy thing to do. Dr. Sims said I was putting it too stringently, putting it, he said, as only a perfectionist would. Can I deny that? (74)

As an example of a person dispossessed of poetry, Seymour offers Mrs. Fedder: "A person deprived, for life, of any understanding or taste for the main current of poetry that flows through things, all things. She might as well be dead, and yet she goes on living. ... I love her. I find her unimaginably brave" (72). By living outside poetry, she lives a life very nearly defined by Walt, as relayed to Franny by Zooley, as religious: "The



religious life, and all the agony that goes with it, is just something God sicks on people who have the gall to accuse Him of having created an ugly world” (154). Unable to appreciate the world’s poetry, Walt would pity Mrs. Fedder. Seymour, on the other hand, loves her and (possibly) envies her bravery. Mrs. Fedder does not transcend contradiction—she discriminates by being irritably opinionated in personal matters, which Zoey advises Franny to not concern herself with, such as deciding that Seymour is a schizophrenic homosexual—but Seymour appreciates that she lives a Taoist life that he could not withstand at the moment (even if she does not realize it).

Mrs. Fedder is somewhat comparable to Teddy; living while deprived of the poetry of the world is not far removed from invalidating language’s (or logic’s) control over what we perceive as reality, because language attaches value and obstructs true knowledge. Poetry (at least bad poetry) risks sentimentality, or “gives to a thing more tenderness than God gives to it” (Carpenters 67). God does not love kittens that are cutely costumed with booties more than the invaluable dead cat.

While Seymour’s journal expounds the unpoetic bravery of Mrs. Fedder, Buddy offers the elderly wedding guest as an alternative: “I glanced past and behind [Mrs. Burwick], furtively, at the fifth passenger—the tiny elderly man—to see if his insularity was still intact. It was. No one’s indifference has ever been such a comfort to me” (42). With his dismissal of “Bananafish,” Buddy comes closest to re-animating Seymour within this elderly man. Like Seymour, the elderly man displays a glorious “grin that was no less resplendent for the fact that it made no sense whatever” (47). Buddy praises his single word response to their invitation—“Delighted”—as inherently poetic (49), just as he defends Seymour to the guests by saying, “Not one Goddamn person, of all the patronizing, fourth rate critics and column writers, had ever seen him for what he really was. A poet, for God’s sake. And I mean a *poet*. If he never wrote a line of poetry, he could still flash what he had at you with the back of his ear if he wanted to” (60). Quickly, Buddy counts the elder as a friend (54) for his silence.

His contrast to the company he keeps, the other wedding guests, perhaps raises the elderly man in Buddy’s view. Mrs. Burwick, in particular, bombards Buddy with criticisms of Seymour. Like Franny in crisis ridiculing Professor Tupper’s narcissism, Mrs. Burwick picks at everything she thinks that she knows about Seymour. She repeats Mrs. Fedder’s fear that Seymour is a schizophrenic homosexual. She aloofly condemns Bessie and Les for allowing their children to perform on “It’s A Wise Child” because she hates precocious children. Tyrannically, she offers her amateur psychiatric condemnation from the comfort of Buddy’s couch:

I’d die, in fact, before I’d let any child of mine turn himself into a little exhibitionist before the public. It warps their whole entire lives. The publicity and all, if nothing else—ask any psychiatrist. I mean how can you have any kind of a normal childhood or anything? ... That’s probably what’s the matter with that brother of yours. ... I mean you lead an absolutely freakish life like that when you’re a kid, and so naturally you never learn to grow up. You never learn to relate to normal people or anything. That’s exactly what Mrs. Fedder was saying in that crazy bedroom a couple of hours ago. But exactly. Your brother’s never learned to relate to anybody. All he can do, apparently, is go around giving people a bunch of stitches in their faces. He’s absolutely unfit for marriage or anything halfway normal, for goodness’ sake. (58–59)

Throughout “Seymour,” Buddy attacks critics, the last to be redeemed, begrudgingly, by Christ’s warning to call no man a fool. He decries academic fascination with biography. (138–140) He self-satisfactorily presents Kierkegaard, who “was never a Kierkegaardian, let alone an Existentialist,” (100) as an example of how critics can hijack meaning. He skeptically deconstructs the role of criticism in the marketing of literature. (Buddy perhaps protests too much; one of Seymour’s notes of advice, the story of the great music critic, (155) reveals Buddy’s artistic concern for critical praise before popular success.)



Buddy's preference for a world without critics, as well as the wedding guests' uninformed speculations about Seymour, may be born from the uninformed critical reaction to Seymour in "A Perfect Day For Bananafish."

With the qualification that we cannot know how much the "Bananafish" Seymour is Seymour Glass and not Buddy, James E. Bryan speculates that sexual guilt motivates Seymour's suicide in his article, "Salinger's Seymour's Suicide": "In anticipation of the rest of Buddy's Seymoursaga, however, it does seem to me that there is sufficient evidence to infer that (1) Seymour is troubled by some sort of guilt peculiar, in the Salinger system, to adults; and (2) at least part of that guilt is sexual" (226). Bryan will hypothesize that this sexual guilt resembles pedophilia, as it is directed toward Sybil. By conjecturing sexual guilt, Bryan risks repeating the same speculation presented by Buddy in the voice of Mrs. Burwick in "Raise High The Roof Beam, Carpenters," substituting homosexuality with a perverse proclivity. That Buddy does not like it does not, of course, make Bryan's argument wrong. We have seen that Buddy shies away from listing Seymour's flaws; additionally, Buddy admits to never forgiving Seymour when he reveals that only Zooney has (Zooney 68). Buddy's inability to answer our curiosity, Bryan argues, leaves the problem to the critics.

With Buddy's adoption of Salinger's career, Bryan proposes to isolate character traits—or "symptoms" (226)—of Seymour in other characters to better understand how these traits function in a Salinger-created reality. Speculating if in Salinger's Blake-like system innocence and "the ultimate hope of the world lie with the young," (227) Buddy's choice in "Seymour: An Introduction" to remember Seymour as a child would be a deliberate choice to avoid confronting a Seymour corrupted by adulthood. Bryan chooses Holden Caulfield's teacher, Antolini, as "the only adult sensitive and intelligent enough to give Holden Caulfield the support he needs" (227). His choice to present Antolini as the best that the adult world of Salinger offers is disingenuously convenient because Antolini "in his own homosexual weakness ... apparently tries to seduce

Holden" (227). Antolini's interaction with Holden allows Bryan to make a sexual analogy to Seymour, with Sybil replacing Holden.

Bryan's characterization of Antolini, however, misses the point of the scene. While trying to sleep at Grand Central Station, Holden reconsiders the event:

But what *did* worry me was the part about how I'd woke up and found him patting me on the head and all. I mean I wondered if just maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass at me. I wondered if maybe he just liked to pat guys on the head when they're asleep. I mean how can you tell about that stuff for sure? You can't. (194–195)

Like Leo Percepied's repulsion toward Mardou, Holden reacts upon awakening, before he can think about the situation. Antolini may or may not be homosexual; as Holden states, we cannot know. Holden's reaction, an assumption of a sexual motive, is the corruption from innocence. If we were to apply a lesson from this scene to "Bananafish," that lesson would be to take care what we assume.

Bryan also considers Seymour in contrast to Teddy, "a paragon of the sort of perfectness of soul that the Glasses of the stories seek" (227). Bryan does not read too deeply into "Teddy" when he concludes that Teddy is a spiritual paragon. While Teddy possesses great spiritual knowledge, he's so anxious about reaching spiritual fulfillment before he can be sidetracked that he lives only to die. Knowing an accident awaits him at his swimming lesson, Teddy could choose to avoid death and enjoy the poetry of life. Instead, he marches to his death; he is no less suicidal than Seymour.

Because Teddy's vulnerability is sex, Bryan assumes sex to likewise be Seymour's weakness, with Muriel Fedder filling the role of temptress that distracted Teddy in his previous incarnation. All the evidence presented to us regarding Seymour's relationship with Muriel indicates a lack of sex. Bryan draws on these details, citing Seymour's diary entries from "Raise High The



Roof Beam, Carpenters,” to admit that Seymour does not have an active sex drive, but he uses this analysis to indict Seymour on perversity. Every detail of the story, in Bryan’s reading, reflects on Seymour’s sexuality:

Seymour’s psychotic urge to knock down trees does not seem a frustration of impotence but rather a manifestation of his struggle to transcend sex entirely. And if there are sexual connotations in the central symbol of the gluttonous bananafish gorging themselves, they are of a regretted potency. ... The bananafish primarily suggest a surfeiting with corrupt adult experience, a “tragic life” of biological gorging at the expense of the soul. (229)

To paraphrase Freud, sometimes a tree is just a tree: a large, solid object that might kill you if you crash a car into it at high speeds.

Warren French agrees with Bryan that the bananafish represents Seymour:

On a literal level, it is clear that since Seymour is the only character besides the bananafish who dies in the story, and since he has brought a suicide weapon with him, he identifies with the fish and the fever that kills them. The third-person narrator (much later identified as Seymour’s brother Buddy) never discusses Seymour’s motivation; but even though the suicide comes with startling suddenness, it is not really surprising. ... The story is entirely successful as a minutely detailed account of a psychotic’s predictable and foreshadowed self-destruction.

In French’s reading, the bananafish parable equates to a suicide note:

Their habits are *very* peculiar. ... [Bananafish] lead a very tragic life. ... You know what they do, Sybil? ... Well, they swim into a hole where there’s a lot of bananas. They’re very ordinary-looking fish when they swim *in*. But once they get in, they behave like pigs. Why, I’ve known

some bananafish to swim into a banana hole and eat as many as seventy-eight bananas. ... Naturally, after that they’re so fat they can’t get out of the hole again. Can’t fit through the door. ... Well, I hate to tell you, Sybil. They die. (15–16)

If a bananafish represents unimpeded sexual appetite, it would necessarily be feminine appetite—the phallus would be represented by the bananas that are engorged—and reflect Seymour’s awareness (consciously or subconsciously) of Muriel’s frustration rather than his own desire.

Seymour’s diary concludes, “If I’m anything by a clinical name, I’m a kind of paranoiac in reverse. I suspect people of plotting to make me happy” (75–76). By “plotting” to make him “happy,” Seymour means happiness as people like Mrs. Fedder define it, such as physical pleasure. When Seymour tells Muriel that he is too happy to marry, he obviously uses the word “happy” to signify something else because he has not “seduced” her. Bryan, however, chooses to align with the Mrs. Fedders and Burwicks, assuming, “It is happiness of the flesh that Seymour is afraid of” (228). Because Muriel reads an article entitled “Sex is Fun—or Hell,” Bryan assumes she is sexually active: “Seymour is depressed by his own concupiscence and Muriel’s sexual hold upon him, by the stupefying and despiritualizing bonds which have kept Teddy from Brahma and which Seymour sees as inescapable and fatal to his spiritual progress” (229). To assume that a married couple is sexually active is normal. However, Seymour proves aloof to the trappings of sexuality throughout the Seymoursaga. Also, Muriel’s interest in the magazine article might more likely arise from her sexual frustration.

However, the bananafish serves as a parable that encompasses more than sexuality. In “Zooey,” Franny expands on the idea of greed that Salinger first introduces with “Bananafish”:

What happened was, I got the idea in my head—and I could not get it out—that college was just one more *dopey, inane* place in the



world dedicated to piling up treasure on earth and everything. I mean treasure is *treasure*, for heaven's sake. What's the difference whether the treasure is money, or property, or even culture, or even just plain knowledge? It all seemed like exactly the same thing to me, if you take off the wrapping. (146)

Zoey adds, "As a matter of simple logic, there's no difference at all, that *I* can see, between the man who's greedy for material treasure—or even intellectual treasure—and the man who's greedy for spiritual treasure" (148).

When Bryan focuses strictly on the sexual implications of the bananafish parable, he limits the scope of Seymour's analogy too drastically. If Seymour tells a parable about sexual appetite, he is not teaching a pre-sexual toddler a lesson because she is not capable of comprehending it; rather, he is making a confession about his own sexual nature. That confession sexually victimizes Sybil, who, in such an analysis is a paragon on innocence, while "Seymour seems to be trying, in some patently occult manner, to appropriate":

She is introduced as sitting on a world-shaped, "huge, inflated beach ball," and later she sinks "a foot in a soggy, collapsed castle"—both images symbolically suggesting that her guiltlessness gives her a kind of dominion over the sin-crumbled adult world. (228–229)

The innocent Sybil supposedly recognizes Seymour as a gluttonous bananafish, so he decides on suicide.

In Seymour's view, however, Sybil is not a paragon of innocence. When asked why he likes Sharon Lipschutz, he offers the rival child as a lesson for Sybil:

What I like particularly about her is that she never does anything mean to little dogs in the lobby of the hotel. That little toy bull that belongs to that lady from Canada, for instance. You probably won't believe this, but *some* little girls like to poke that little dog with balloon sticks. Sharon doesn't. She's never mean or

unkind. That's why I like her so much. (15)

The relationship between pets and their owners is somewhat of a leit motif throughout the Glass stories. Just as Kerouac's Gerard indicates to his little brother, the way a person treats an animal indicates a level of spiritual evolution. Sybil's treatment of the toy bull places her in the spiritual category of Teddy's sister, Booper. Because Bryan gives too much weight to sexuality, and then assigns sexual guilt to Seymour, he misunderstands the relationship between Seymour and Sybil. Rather than a Theda Bara-type vamp preying on the innocent and unsuspecting, Seymour adopts a mentor role with Sybil. When he comments that Sybil is wearing a blue bathing suit, Seymour wants to know if Sybil is fit to look for horses, just like the girl Buddy encounters in the grocery story with two boyfriends, "*Bobby and Dorothy*" (Zoey 64).

If "Bananafish" reveals to us the motivation behind Seymour's suicide, that motivation likely comes from Seymour's last interaction with another human:

On the sub-main floor of the hotel, which the management directed bathers to use, a woman with zinc salve on her nose got into the elevator with the young man.

"I see you're looking at my feet," he said to her when the car was in motion.

"I beg your pardon?" said the woman.

"I said I see you're looking at my feet."

"I *beg* your pardon. I happened to be looking at the floor," said the woman, and faced the doors of the car.

"If you want to look at my feet, say so," said the young man. "But don't be a God-damned sneak about it. ... I have two normal feet and I can't see the slightest God-damned reason why anybody should stare at them." (17–18)

In this scene, Seymour overreacts to the type of criticism he faces throughout his life, as a result of his role on



“It’s A Wise Child.” To him, the woman judging his feet in the elevator is equivalent to Mrs. Fedder calling him a schizophrenic homosexual, or critics describing his interaction with Sybil as sexual.

If we confine our reading to just “Bananafish” in determining Seymour’s mental state, it’s worth noting that the story introduces Seymour to us through unqualified gossip:

“Your father talked to Dr. Sivetski.”

“Oh?” said the girl.

“He told him everything. At least, he said he did—you know your father. The trees. That business with the window. Those horrible things he said to Granny about her plans for passing away. What he did with all those lovely pictures from Bermuda—everything.”

“Well?” said the girl.

“Well. In the first place, he said it was perfect *crime* the Army released him from the hospital—my word of honor. He very *definitely* told your father there’s a chance—a very *great* chance, he said—that Seymour may completely lose control of himself. My word of honor. ... We’re *very* worried about you. Your father wanted to wire you *last night* to come home.” (6–7)

This conversation, and Dr. Sivetski’s reckless diagnosis, says more about the environment that Seymour lives in than it does about Seymour himself. After the disappointment with Sybil, who frustratingly failed to understand the bananafish parable, Seymour overreacts when he encounters the woman in the elevator, revealing a sensitivity the result, perhaps, of suffering the Fedder’s opinions without defending himself. Instead, he resorted to passive-aggressive acts, such as crashing Mr. Fedder’s car. The story does not indicate that Seymour loves Muriel less now than on the day that he married her. We also cannot conclude that Muriel loves Seymour any less; despite living in a dangerous situation, by Mrs.

Fedder’s estimation, Muriel will not leave. She trusts Seymour to not harm her (or, at the least, weighs that risk against the hope of everything being alright). When he shoots himself in the head, Seymour chooses the sight of Muriel, sleeping, as his last. Though we cannot be sure, that choice is at least as likely motivated by love rather than contempt.

If the Seymour of “Bananafish” resembles Buddy, “Seymour’s” suicide reflects Buddy’s own death wish. Throughout the Glass novellas, Buddy attempts to resurrect Seymour through his letters, which are presented increasingly without comment. This cycle culminates in “Hapworth 16, 1924,” in which, aside from a brief introduction, Buddy reserves comment. By choosing to stand silent, however, Buddy allows Seymour’s ghost to threaten what he defines as his own identity:

What I *am*, I think, is a thesaurus of undetached prefatory remarks about him. I believe I essentially remain what I’ve always been—a narrator, but one with extremely pressing personal needs. (107)

The difficulty, for Buddy, is that so much of his identity originates in his relationship to Seymour, and the Glass novellas are essentially Buddy’s attempt to know himself.

In Seymour’s “Tyger” letter of encouragement to Buddy, individuality is defined through social relationships:

One of the few things left in the world, aside from the world itself, that sadden me every day is an awareness that you get upset if Boo Boo or Walt tells you you’re saying something that sounds like me. You sort of take it as an accusation of piracy, a little slam at your individuality. Is it so bad that we sometimes sound like each other? The membrane is so thin between us. Is it so important for us to keep in mind which is whose? That time two summers ago when I saw out so long, I was able to trace



that you and Z. and I have been brothers for no fewer than four incarnations, maybe more. Is there no beauty in that? For us, doesn't each of our individualities begin right at the point where we own up to our extremely close connections and accept the inevitability of borrowing one another's jokes, talents, idiocies? (157–158)

Though Seymour uses a personal first-person plural “us” that may be exclusive to Buddy, Zooney, and himself, that “us” separated by a thin membrane is also society at large. Individuality comes from our most individual and original experiences, those shared with others. An unshared experience lacks contrast and difference. It just exists, without the potential to be understood. A shared experience, however, transcends language.

Though his guests are interested in Charlotte's nine stitches, Buddy withholds the story until only the deaf-mute elderly man remains:

“He threw [the stone] at her because she looked so beautiful sitting there in the middle of the driveway with Boo Boo's cat. Everybody knew that, for God's sake—me, Charlotte, Boo Boo, Waker, Walt, the whole family.” ... I looked up at my guest, expecting him to dispute me, to call me a liar. I am a liar, of course. Charlotte never did understand why Seymour threw that stone at her. My guest didn't dispute me, though. The contrary. He grinned at me encouragingly, as though anything further I had to say on the subject could go down only as the absolute truth with him. (89)

The elder cannot hear Buddy's explanation, nor could he repeat it to anyone. To tell him the truth, to say that Charlotte did not understand, would be the simplest, least anxious words he could speak all day. Buddy's choice to lie, just as his choice to write himself into Seymour's suicide, betrays his lack of understanding and acceptance of his brother. Because he does not actually communicate the story to the elderly man, only Buddy receives his own words; he lies to himself. When he considers relaying the events of the day to Seymour,

however, no words are necessary:

I still rather think [the elderly man's] cigar end should have been forwarded on to Seymour, the usual run of wedding gifts being what it is. Just the cigar, in a small, nice box. Possibly with a blank sheet of paper enclosed, by way of explanation. (92)

In *Killing Yourself To Live*, Chuck Klosterman travels across America to visit the sights of famous rock n' roll deaths in an attempt to understand why the death of a celebrity seems to transcend that celebrity's life. He concludes his journey by visiting Kurt Cobain's hometown of Aberdeen, Washington, to find the bridge that inspired the song “Something In The Way”:

It doesn't matter if Kurt Cobain slept underneath any of [the town's bridges]; what matters is that people *believe* he did and that this is something they want to believe. Maybe it's something they *need* to believe, because if they don't, they will be struck with the mildly depressing revelation that dead people are simply dead. Everything else is human construction; everything else has nothing to do with the individual who died and everything to do with the people who are left behind (and who maybe wish those roles were somehow reversed). (230)

Though he's writing about the way a celebrity's death can impact people who never met that celebrity, Klosterman could be writing about Buddy and Seymour. Withdrawing to the hermitage of an upstate New York cabin, the relationships that define Buddy's individuality are shed until only Seymour's ghost remains. Buddy acknowledges that his representation of Seymour is somewhat high; it's not his responsibility to disclose his brother's faults. By evolving to something higher in death, Seymour transcends death and requisitions Buddy's identity. Buddy's choice to allow Seymour's ghost to envelop his existence is a manifestation of his own death wish, as postulated by Zooney:

This whole goddam house stinks of ghosts. I



don't mind so much being haunted by a dead ghost, but I resent like *hell* being haunted by a half-dead one. I wish to *God Buddy*'d make up his mind. He does everything else Seymour ever did—or tries to. Why the hell doesn't he kill himself and be done with it? (103)

Contemplating Mlle Vinteuil's habits, Proust's narrator gathers, "It was not evil that gave her the idea of pleasure, that seemed to her attractive; it was pleasure, rather, that seemed evil. And as, each time she indulged in it, it was accompanied by evil thoughts such as ordinarily had no place in her virtuous mind, she came at length to see in pleasure itself something diabolical, to identify it with Evil" (232). In Mlle Vinteuil, Proust provides a model of behavior influenced by language. Evil, as opposite to virtue, does not motivate her; she seeks pleasure, but not to spite her parents. Because the pleasure she seeks opposes the values taught to her, Virtue, the positive of pleasure connotes negatively; thus, pleasure aligns with Evil. When Mlle Vinteuil accepts her pursuits as evil, she rebels against Virtue and her parents. However, she cannot liberate herself from the controls of language because she accepts the traditional valuation of good and evil.

As with Mlle Vinteuil, sexuality is a keystone issue for the development of the individual throughout the collective works of Kerouac and Salinger. Whether, as some critics conclude, he suffers from perverse sexual appetites or he struggles to defend his asexuality against the expectations of his marriage, Seymour discovers sex to be the obstacle to his happiness. The presence of a child at Seymour's sexual crisis seems to place more urgency on resolving his motivation, less we fail to condemn a pederast. Gerard's priest redefines his childlike biological curiosity to teach him the sinister valuation of homosexuality. Sexuality is used by both authors to explore how society reinforces its values and the potential of sexual contact obscures motivation in interpersonal interactions. We question Seymour's interest in Sybil just as Teddy displays a weariness of the female crewmembers. To not acknowledge the potential for sex at the periphery of any social situation

is to be naive and childlike, as Mrs. Fedder characterizes Seymour before the wedding. Approaching adulthood, Holden Caulfield questions his assumption that Mr. Antolini intended to seduce him and he grasps at the unsatisfyingly innocent explanation that his teacher simply likes to pat boys' heads. For Gerard, religion contributes to the value of sexuality by codifying expectations of behavior and benefiting from the presumption of God's will expressed institutionally.

Both Jack and Buddy are subjected to the tragic circumstances of their brothers' deaths and, unlike the audiences at the ancient Greek theatres, forced to find their own catharsis. On sacrifice in tragedy, Terry Eagleton suggests, "For political chance to take root we must divest ourselves of our current identities, staked as they are on a false identity, and this demands a painful process of self-abandonment" (275). Jack and Buddy each commits himself to memorializing his deceased prophet brother through persistent invocations. By engaging their memories, each narrator re-explores the philosophy of his brother to better understand how he perceives the world. They abandon their identity in society and withdraw to Nature to discover their true desires. As Seymour infers, however, society is necessary for the identity of the individual, who exists in relation to another. Thus, while the characters of Salinger and Kerouac determine to construct their own knowledge of the world free from the preconceived teachings of their society, these same characters are drawn to the society of the family to share their experiences. ¶



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Venturing Forth

§

Kenneth Pobo

In the Venture Inn, older gay men chat
at the bar while we order and discuss
the flower show. Happy, I softly hum
Al Martino's "Spanish Eyes." Wrapped
in white paper, a pitcher plant
watches us split
an order of clams casino. Damned

if that isn't Oscar Wilde dashing in the door,
cruising, leaving. Our feet ache from walking
around blue ribbons. Some orchids,
while splendid, looked uppity. Who would
gossip with them? A stranger shouts out
RITA HAYWORTH. And why not?
She could be worth shouting about. No one here

can legally marry. A potted palm, heterosexuality
seems wonderfully distant, stuck
in an apartment window, wilted. We bought too many
marigold and zinnia seeds. Only more will do,
you say. Maybe. Let's have dessert tonight,

scoop it right out of the night sky, plop
It on our plates. Sweet. Then out
onto Camac Street, wind sneaking
hundreds of hands up our shirts. ¶



This Late at Night

§

Jeff Klooger

He tumbles out of the dark house into a meadow, green
- but aren't they always? When we wake, he is already there,
the secret of his origin lost somewhere
in the rainbow-coloured snow of our unconsciousness.

The meadow oozes black mud:

rich, organic stuff - healthy, we imagine,
though pesticide residue is invisible, tasteless,
and altogether too slow for television.

Why are the good guys shredding documents? They're unofficial, their mission
a concoction of the liberal press. And what is it
about lipstick and fatigues? Twin warning signs, twin dangers?

They're blowing up the heavy artillery now, and above the smouldering debris
of their efficiency, two parachutists

pas de deux. Back on board, she doesn't notice that our hero,
Houdini-like, has picked her lock. He's going to win
(we knew he would). He falls from the sky

into his comrades' arms. How vulnerable he seems now,
how open, almost broken, how un-American. He has, anyway,
the sort of square-jawed, sensuous face that blurs
the line between masculine and feminine.

We love him for that.

Later we will cook pasta, repair old shoes, clothe our suitcases
in fur, and sit alone, finally, a teacup our only prop,
speaking silent words of protest to someone
not famous enough to be seen or named.

Tyranny must be resisted, we infer. Ah yes, this late at night
we can only acquiesce. ¶



Doing Good

§

Terence Kuch

The Leader calls me this morning. “Ron,” he says, “there’s a poor family out on the Groveton Pike could use some social work, picnic hamper, food stamps, can of soup, stuff like that. Do ’em good.” I strap on my pistol. I know the Leader’s a busy man, but he always finds time to call when he hears about Americans in trouble. He calls us here at the Social Police, cuts right through all those layers of bureaucracy, tells me about it. “Straighten ’em out, you know, there’s nothin’ like hunger to turn a man against his leader.”

The Leader got every vote in the last election; he needs to keep his record intact in the next. If one, even one voter writes in some other name, then the Leader’s just another bum. Has to win ’em all. That’s when we started wearing guns, when the picnic basket wasn’t enough. Now, I can read minds. Not really, but the family out on the Groveton Pike thinks I can, because my training is so good. Howard (that’s his name, the man out on the Pike) thinks I can read his mind and I don’t tell him I can’t -- I just finger my pistol, sometimes spin it around cowboy style, point it at Howard or at his little daughter Gracie --

that’s all he’s got left now; his wife and brother and sister weren’t absolutely grateful; the Leader thought they might vote against him in the next election. So I deleted them, that is after reading their minds and understanding that they would do anything to save their skins, even vote for the Leader, but being scared, y’know, they might get a little confused there inside the voting booth and push the wrong lever, realize it was the wrong lever and in a panic rush to undo their grievous wrong but instead accidentally shove the handle that enters the vote and opens the curtains -- and there I am, ready to shoot but too late, the Leader’s lost a vote, there’s criticism of the way he’s been running the country, it’s all over, no more calls for me, no more picnic baskets for them.

So I need to keep that from happening with Howard and his kid. I get there, knock on the door. Howard answers, little Gracie right behind him. They smile at a familiar face. I say “Bang, bang, you’re dead!” wait for them to realize I didn’t shoot. They laugh, knowing I’ll do ’em good. Then I shoot. ¶

