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Sheba: Pecola's Daughter

AN HONORS THESIS

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Distinction
in the Department of *English*

by

Brittany Basden

May, 2013

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a tragic American story. We empathize with Pecola suffering as a little black girl who wanted blue eyes more than anything. She was born to a mother obsessed with a fantastical Hollywood ideal and a father who was abandoned in a trash heap as a baby.

Pecola's parents were haunted by their humiliating pasts of rejection. Like them, Pecola craved love.

Pecola's father rapes her and she becomes pregnant. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's baby does not survive, but it is possible to imagine a world that includes her.

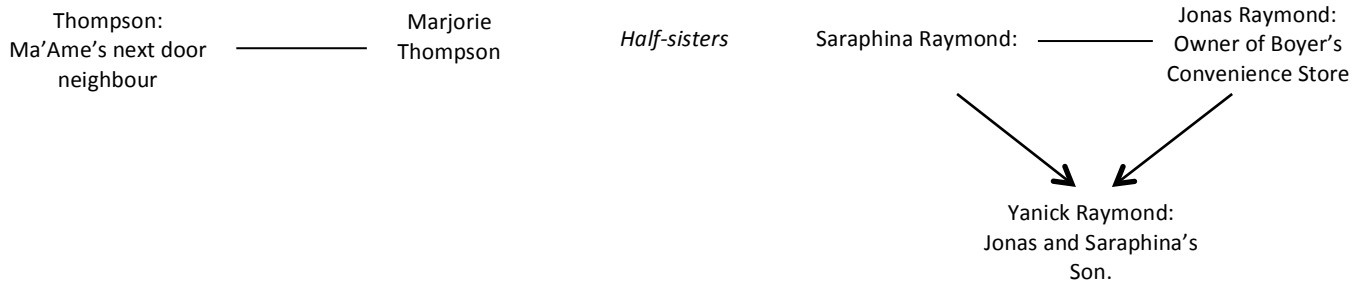
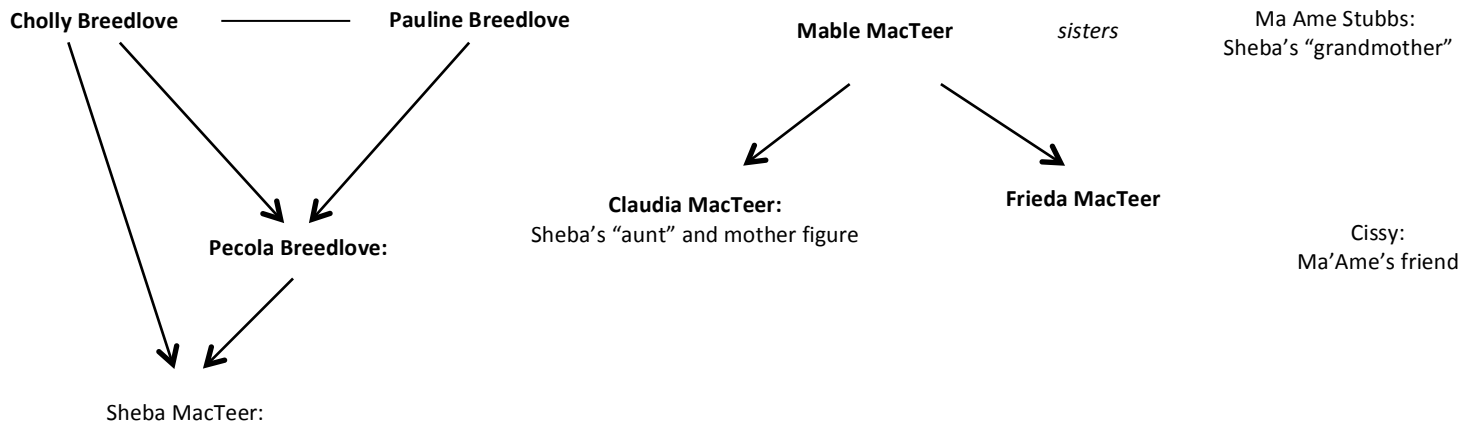
This work imagines that Pecola's baby survives and Claudia, a friend to Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, names her Sheba. In Lorain, Ohio, Sheba becomes known as "that baby" and without having to explain much more, everyone understood who was being talked about.

Claudia moves with Sheba to the Bahamas where they live with Claudia's Aunt, Ma Ame. People in The Bahamas do not know what albinism is and can't be bothered to figure out why Sheba is so much lighter than them. They do not care to know why her eyes and hair look like curry powder. They simply refer to her as "that girl with the pale skin" or "that girl with the funny eyes."

It is Claudia's hope that Sheba will become more than *that*.

Character Map

*Characters in bold are from *The Bluest Eye*



PART
ONE

A withered rose petal, my mother rests in the bosom of safety and silence. She barely sees me, but traces of her linger in my reflection. She does not speak to me. She cannot speak at all. She just lays there, lips pinned together. She makes no sound except for the hum accompanying the rise and fall of her chest, like wind flowing over the top of an open bottle. This is her song. The only one she has left. A song of loneliness that fornicates with hurt, birthing pain with remnants of devastation. She longed desperately to be beautiful in a world that insisted she was ugly. In the dark she searched for love and in the light she longed for blue eyes. What she thought of as inadequacies ate her up, swallowed her whole, and dissolved her like the rain did to limestone building she lived in. Her name is Pecola and I am her daughter.

My eyes are not blue.

But I am beautiful.

My name is Sheba.

I am the daughter of Pecola.

My passage from the womb of my mother to this world of sin was begrudged. Even as I drew my first breath, I was cursed. My grandmother never set eyes on me because I was evidence of what happened when no one was looking. Like everybody else, she tried to forget what happened in the dark after the sun rose the next day. But I would not go away. I was the stench of piss and weed that strangled the air she breathed before she closed her eyes at night. Or the stain she fiercely tried to wipe away on the dress of that white woman she worked for. I think she wanted to love me, but she did not know how. Her hate was misplaced love. How could she love someone who was supposed to be her granddaughter and not her daughter? Or was it the other way around? She crumbled under the weight of her love and hate for me that gained intensity with each rise and fall of her chest. She could not write me into her story, but I was there already. She refused to turn the page and face me because she knew that I could not be erased. So she closed the whole book, set it on the shelf, and allowed it to be buried under dust until she could no longer recognize it.

I never fit into very many stories except for those of my Aunt Claudia and her sister Frieda. My Aunt Claudia is a force beyond measure that I felt every day in the small of my back and the base of my chin.

“Stand tall and keep your head up so you can see where you are going. Be careful where you step and when you do make sure they are meaningful.”

I had no idea why I had to make my steps meaningful. I didn't even know how to do that. But she told me this every morning when she dropped me to elementary school. I have very few memories of Ohio. I remember hearing “don't go outside” a lot. But on Sundays, after pastors quoted the scripture and after little girls put away their good dresses for the next week, Aunt Claudia and I would go down to the railroad tracks. She always had something on her mind as we walked. I could tell because she always had an intense look in her eyes and heaviness in her step. She wouldn't speak until the sun looked like it was sitting on the ground. Depending on what time we got out there, that could take a few minutes or a half hour.

“Aunt Claudia,” I would whisper.

“Shhh...”

“Why don't you say something?”

"I'm listening."

"Listening to what?"

"The wind."

I tried to listen, but I heard nothing but the sounds of our shoes scrapping against the rocks. Not only could I not hear the wind, but I couldn't feel it either. All I could feel was the dirt between my toes, the itch of weeds on my ankle, and the sweat that burned my eye. I was slightly jealous of Aunt Claudia because whatever it was she was hearing, I could not hear.

"What is it telling you?"

"It's singing a song."

"Sing it for me."

"I wish I could, but it's my song. You have to listen for your own song and sing it for yourself."

Whatever the wind told Aunt Claudia, I wanted it to tell me as well.

It would be our secret.

April 27, 1965

Lynden Pindling, leader of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) threw the Speaker's Mace out of the House of Assembly window in protest against the unfair gerry-mandering of constituency boundaries by then white-majority ruling United Bahamian Party (UBP). The leader of the party that wins the most seats in the House of Parliament becomes Premier. House seats correspond with constituencies, or clusters of neighborhoods. Gerry-mandering is the process of making constituencies known to support the opposition party larger. In this case, the UBP is believed to have grouped the black neighbourhoods into larger constituencies and the white neighbourhoods into smaller constituencies. This decreases the chances of the PLP winning the election.

Sheba is 10 years old.

Since retiring last year from the Straw Market, Ma Ame spent the majority of her time in her iris garden in the backyard. There, she gossiped with Mis' Cissy, or at least Mis' Cissy tried to gossip with her.

"Mornin' Ame!"

"Mornin' Ciss."

"You sure love those irises."

"Somethin' tells me they'll be beautiful this season."

"You heard 'bout Pastor Duncombe and..." Ma Ame didn't like gossiping so she was happy to be interrupted by Thompson.

"Pindling throw the mace out the window!" he shouted. Thompson loved anybody that stood up against "da man" as he always said. As a self-proclaimed true Bahamian, he is a staunch supporter of "'da black man." In this case, the black man is Lynden Pindling. "I just heard it on the radio! Nobody knows why, but the reporter said he threw it out the window at a crowd of people who were below," he said.

"Well it's high time somebody did something 'bout those people who killed my Walter. He should have thrown Premier Symonette out while he was at it." Walter was Mis' Cissy's husband who died a long time ago. He was a ZNS news reporter and one night he left some notes he needed to prepare a story at the station. He went back to get them and what happened when he got there is still unknown, but Miss Cissy found his lifeless body next to his car in the company parking lot. The police said he was mugged because all his money was taken, but Miss Cissy is convinced that the UBP had him killed because he spoke out against the party and the ways they oppressed black people in The Bahamas. "I know my Walter and if it really was a mugging like the police said, then why did they have to shoot him? Walter would have just given them the money. Plus they never found the notes Wally left. I bet those notes had something in them that the UBP did not want the public to know about." This is what I overheard her say to Ma Ame one day.

I wasn't concerned with old people talk especially when Thompson was involved. Something about him just wasn't right. It was a miracle Aunt Claudia let me stay home from

school today, but my fever forced her to. Despite the noise of adults outside, I would have slept until the early afternoon. The slit of sunlight shining through the gap between the pale green curtains worked against my efforts.

"Wake up girl!" Ma Ame shouted at me through the window.

There was a damp, grey spot on the sheet where I lay my head. My throat screamed for water and I could feel beads of sweat creeping up my back. My hair was matted and stuck to my cheek and little peas of hair formed along my hairline. I tried to detangle them with my fingers, but they rolled right back up.

Frustration set in as I stood in front of the bathroom mirror. I cursed my hair under my breath and picked the crust out of eyes. The cool water was a blessing to my face as toothpaste was to my breath. I tugged at my hair, pulling strands all over, trying to stretch it out, but I was fighting air. There was no point.

"I hear water, but I don't hear no movement," said Ma Ame. It was like she was in the bathroom with me. "Soon directly I have to take you to Boyer's to get some Buckley's for that flem on your chest. Put on some clothes. I don't know who gets sick this time of year anyway." I was disgusted by the green gook I coughed up into the sink as I brushed my teeth. It stuck to the side of the sink before I quickly washed it away. I definitely need that Buckley's.

I eventually put on an old hat I found in Aunt Claudia's room to hide my hair. There was leftover coconut tart on the kitchen table that I stuffed into my mouth. I washed that down with some water and went to the front of the house to meet Ma Ame.

"Why you got that thing on your head?"

"Because my hair makes me look like boy." Ma Ame looked at me with those eyes and let out a breath that moved her entire body. She knew what I was thinking. "You know your Aunt Claudia not lettin' you get no perm." I didn't respond. All I could do was gaze down at my sweet water shoes that were a size too small.

"Let me get my purse. Stay right here." *Where else did I have to go?* Ma Ame carried a slim coin purse in her bra wherever she went. Nobody wants to put their hands on an old woman's breast, is what she told me. I believed her.

There was never a time when Boyer's wasn't as congested as the market on Christmas Eve.

"Excuse me! I was here first," said Mis' Pat bumping her trolley into Mis' Wynn's. Those two were the most rambunctious women I've ever met.

"Mis' P-A-T do not P-L-A-Y with me today. I didn't read my Bible this morning and there's no telling what I might say to you," Mis' Wynn snapped back shifting her weight to her one good leg.

Usually Ma Ame would spend at least an hour talking to Mis' Mable about church events. Sister Walker's mother died. Sister Sheila had a baby. The usual. She told Ma' Ame the church picnic is next Saturday under the guinep tree. There are probably hundreds of guinep trees on this island, but everyone knew which once she meant. Mis' Mable was Deacon Young's wife. Word around town is that Deacon Young has been seen on many occasions coming out of

the bleaching woman's house late at night. I think this was what Mis' Cissy was trying to tell Ma Ame this morning before Thompson interrupted her. I know about this because I overheard someone talking about it at school last week. I couldn't stand Mis' Mable so I was glad to know that her husband was cheating on her. She was one of those Bible toting, scripture quoting, 'kneel down and your skirt better touch the floor' women. When she saw me next to Ma Ame, she barely acknowledged me. Although she had to look down to see me, she still turned up her nose.

I stood in the candy section eyeing my favourite treat, the one that's red on one side and yellow on the other. Ma Ame was trying to persuade Jonas, the owner of Boyer's, to give her a bottle Buckley's for £1. It costs £2.

"As much money as I spend in this store, you can't give an old woman like me a pound off?"

"Okay. Okay. Ma Ame. I'll give it to you for £1.50." Ma Ame flashed a bright smile, the one that came out when she got her way. The one that allowed the world to see the gold tooth in the back of her mouth. Everything was always a bargain for her.

As I stared at the candy, contemplating whether I should stuff a few in my pocket or not, I felt uneasy. Not because I knew stealing was wrong, but because I felt like someone was staring at me. I looked around the store to see if anyone was watching before I picked up the candy. People were moving all around me, but when my eyes lingered to the end of the aisle, I saw a boy in an apron that had Boyer's written across the front.

We locked eyes.

I expected him to look away, but he didn't. He simply stood there and looked. His eyes were dark, but not as dark as his skin. His eyes darted from me, to the candy, and then back to me.

"Come Sheba, let's go girl," Ma Ame shouted from the front of the store. "You need to eat some hot soup. I'll make you some chicken souse." I don't know why she insisted on shouting my name wherever we went. It was as if she needed people to know she was around. I would have to put my thoughts of the strange boy at the end of aisle on hold.

As we approached our house, I heard a familiar voice coming through the front window. I immediately knew who it was.

"Aunt Frieda!" I ran into her arms when she opened the door.

"Hi Sheba!"

It was comforting to see someone from Lorain because I felt out of place on this island. The days dragged by and I couldn't wait for summer so I wouldn't have to go to school. Aunt Frieda and Claudia looked like they were catching up on old times as they sucked on mangos. Aunt Claudia slapped my hand when I reached for one.

"I don't have no money to pay for you to see the dentist after your teeth fall out. I see all the candy wrappers under your bed. No sweets for you!"

"Oh stop Claudia. Let Sheba have a mango. It's natural sugar. Ain't nothin' wrong with that."

"Hush Frieda. What you know 'bout anything? Do you have any children?" Aunt Frieda looked down and wiped a spot off of her jeans that wasn't there. It looked like a heavy sadness came over her. I would later learn that she was having problems getting pregnant and had three miscarriages. I took off my hat and threw it on the chair.

"Oooh child! We have to do somethin' with that head of yours." I knew Aunt Frieda would say something about my hair because she was a hair stylist.

"Ain't nothing wrong with her head, she just needs a lil dax gel," Aunt Claudia said.

"At least you have dreads. Your nappy is happy. Sheba can't wear them to school."

"Listen. The child is not getting a perm and that's the end of it." The look Aunt Frieda gave me said otherwise. If she did something to my hair then I could look like the other girls at school and the boys would call me pretty.

Later on that night, around nine, I lay wide awake gazing into blur of the rotating ceiling as it spun. It creaked every other second, but the breeze it created was necessary. Despite the noise, if I had to choose between the fan and the noisy crickets that visited outside my window every time it rained, I would definitely choose the fan. It poured this afternoon, but the crickets were asleep tonight so I would rest easy.

As I walked toward the door to turn off the light, a loud banging on the front door interrupted my thoughts of sleep. We never got visitors this late and when people came to our house, they rarely greeted us by knocking the door; they mostly called to Ma Ame or Aunt Claudia. No one ever called my name.

I peeked through the window to see Miss Marjorie, Thompson's wife, standing on the porch. One of her arms was wrapped around her body, as if it was holding her up. Her other hand was covering her right eye. I heard shuffling in my Aunt's room.

"Whoever that is, it better be good." The squeak of the screen door opening was followed by the shriek of my Aunt. The door on my room was too short for the frame and left a space at the bottom. This meant I could hear everything that was going on.

"Good God Marjorie not again!" Aunt Claudia said letting Miss Marjorie inside, taking her to the kitchen.

"Frieda, Ma Ame, get out here now!" Ma Ame's house slippers dragged on the floor as she walked toward the kitchen.

"Jesus!"

Cups, pots, and pans banged up against one another as Ma Ame shuffled through the cupboard for a bowl. "Frieda, get out here girl," she shouted. It was as if what was going on required the assistance of every woman in the house.

By this time, I'd cracked my door open. My bedroom was directly opposite the kitchen door and I had a clear shot of the scene. Water drizzled out of the faucet when Ma Ame turned the knob. "Out of all the times to have low pressure, tonight just had to be the night." There was a lull. The only thing I heard was the sound of the water hitting the bottom of the silver bowl. "Claudia what are you writing over there?"

"This is the fifth time Marge done been here for the year. I have to write this down so when she finally decides to press charges, she'll have all the information she needs to tell the

police." I glanced Miss Marjorie. I couldn't believe that this was the same woman whose beauty was the envy of all the women in the neighbourhood. Women spent hours in Mis' Cicely's Hair Shop trying to get their curls to bounce like hers. They bought bleaching cream from "The Bleachin' Woman," who went from door to door selling it, so they could have her skin colour.

But this wasn't Miss Marjorie sitting at the dining table in our kitchen, this was someone else. This was small, broken woman with snot dripping from her nose and blood dripping from a gash above her right eye. The hem of her nightgown was brown with mud and one strap was ripped and hung over her shoulder.

As Ma Ame wrung out a soaked wash cloth, Frieda came strolling into the kitchen.

"What's going on out here?" she said rubbing her eyes and tying her robe.

"You sleep like a damn rock. Go outside and cut a piece of aloe to put on Marge's cut. Hurry up. The flashlight is on top of the gas tank." Frieda looked at Miss Marjorie and shook her head.

"I'll be right back." Ma Ame placed a brown bottom on the table along with the bowl of water and sat next to Marjorie, who hadn't said anything since she came.

"Wait Ma Ame, let me take some pictures before you clean her up." Frieda came back inside and began to cut the thorns off of the aloe leaf. Ma Ame turned the brown bottle upside down on the damp cloth.

"Now Marge, this is going to hurt a bit." Ma Ame hesitated as if she was waiting to see if Mis Marjorie would object, but she just sat there. Slowly, with all the gentleness she could muster up, Ma Ame rested the cloth on the gash above Miss Marjorie's eyes. She jerked as if she finally remembered where she was. When Ma Ame was done, she and Frieda traded places.

"Okay Miss Marge, this here aloe gone sooth the burn okay?" She shook her head. From where I was, I could see the back of Aunt Frieda's head, while Aunt Claudia and Ma Ame stood behind Miss Marjorie.

"When are you going to leave him Marge?" This was when I realized that Thompson had done this to Mis' Marjorie. Barely opening her mouth at all,

"I love him," she said. I thought about her words for a long time after that. I thought about how Pastor Duncombe preached that God loved us so much that he sent his son to die to save us from our sins. Did loving someone mean you were willing to die for them? I didn't want to die for anyone.

April 28, 1965

Ma Ame sent Aunt Frieda to pick me up from school because I was still sick. She borrowed the old car Mis Cissy had in her yard. Not having to walk home in the hot, afternoon sun was rare. I would have to wear a hat and a lot of sunscreen so my skin wouldn't burn. My hat was ugly and the other children called me "hat girl." I thought it was unoriginal. Seriously? Is that all they could come up with? When Aunt Frieda pulled up in the school parking lot, I pleased to see that Rachel, the most popular girl in school, was watching me. The corner of her upper lip was turned up and her head was slightly bent. She placed one hand a'kimba and bent her knee. Jealousy had become her best friend and satisfaction came over me.

Aunt Frieda was belting out *The Supremes* new song when I got into the car.

"Aunt Frieda, you think you can perm my hair for me please?" She stopped singing right as The Supremes sang, "stop in the name of love."

"I don't know Sheba," she replied adjusting the mirror so she could put on some lipstick. "You heard Claudia. She said she don't want no perm in your head."

"Please Aunt Frieda. You only have to leave in on for a little bit and then you can wash it right out. It doesn't have to be straight, I just want my hair to be longer." I looked down and then looked at her. "Maybe the other children at school won't tease me so much."

"Poor child," Frieda said breathing out. "Where's the nearest convenience store?"

I smiled so hard it hurt. Even though The Supremes sang "think it over," I did not.

"Boyer's is right around the corner."

"Thank God I'm leaving tomorrow because Claudia not gone speak to me after I do this." Two hours later, my hair was long, almost down to middle of my back. I told Aunt Frieda she didn't have to perm it straight, but she said there was no point in perming it if it wasn't going to be as straight as a bone. She said we'll tell Aunt Claudia she straightened it with the hot comb. I didn't really care because I was beautiful. This was worth all the punishment I would get.

At around 5:30, I could here Aunty's keys jingle as she unlocked the front door.

"Let me handle this," Aunt Frieda said. "Hey sister girl! How was work today?"

"It was like any other day. Cases domestic violence and rude ass children. Same mess just a different day. The life of a social worker." She literally froze when she saw my hair. She looked at Aunt Claudia, back at me, and then smiled. It was an eerie smile and it didn't know what to make of it, "What did you do to Sheba's hair Frieda?"

"Just a lil press," she replied scratching the back of her neck. "Nothin' serious. Just working my magic."

"If I put water on it, will it revert?" Aunt Frieda paused. She hadn't thought Aunty would actually put water on it and ruin the style.

"Yea." She cleared her throat. "It'll go back." Aunt went in the kitchen. I heard the fridge open. Water splashing into a cup never sounded so scary. She took a while, longer than usual, but when she came out of the kitchen we exchanged glances. She sat down on the couch. She took her time sitting down, like children do after they got their behinds beat. Aunt Claudia never beat me before, maybe she was trying to show me how I would be sitting down later.

"Anything you want to tell me Sheba?" Aunt Claudia asked, taking a sip of water from the glass.

"No ma'am," I replied, swallowing spit that had sat still in my mouth since Aunt Frieda opened the front door. She got up and slowly walked over to me, never taking her eyes off Frieda. She held the cup up over my head and asked Aunt Frieda,

"One more time sister. Did you perm Sheba's hair?"

"Okay. Okay. Damn! I permed it okay. She was lookin' all sad. All the kids were teasing her at school, calling her raggedy Anne and peasy head. What did you want me to do?"

October 5, 1966

An article was published in the Wall Street Journal claiming that the Freeport gambling license had been corruptly obtained and that Mafia figures were involved casino operation. The article also said that the Freeport casino manager is wanted in the United States for tax evasion, the result of previously operating an illegal bookmaking operation in New York.

After Ma Ame made sure I did my homework, I sat on the top of an upside down bucket by the back door. The doctor said that I was never to be out in the sun too long because it was bad for my skin. The doctor said a lot of things. Many of which I didn't care for. *Don't look directly into the sun. Always wear sunscreen.*

I was listening for the wind. Aunt Claudia believed a light wind, just enough to carry a few leaves a few yards, was God's way of letting you know that everything is going to be alright. The trees were moving, but I didn't feel like things were going to be alright.

There was a trail of ants carrying out their daily activities where the bottom of the concrete wall met the porch. Some ants went left and the others went right. They were able to move past each other touching rarely; there was a system. Things worked for them. Some had little white specks of food on their backs that they carried to a little hole in the ground; a hole to some, but a home to them. There were probably no murders down there. They took care of each other, had meetings, and solved problems.

We were having boiled grouper with yellow corn grits for dinner that evening. I was responsible for making the 'switcher'.

"When I was a lil' girl we had to walk to the mill in Grants Town to get our corn ground into grits. Yinna chil'ren don't know anything about that. All y'all know is what's in the store," said Ma Ame tasting the grouper broth. I could tell it was almost ready by the way she fixed her mouth. When her cooking was not to her liking, she would twist her corner of her mouth up to the left.

Every chance she got, Ma Ame reminding me that my generation knew nothing about hard work. I couldn't understand why she did this. She says that she worked hard to provide a better life for us, but complained when life did actually become better. Ma Ame made the best boiled grouper in all of Bain Town. Sometimes people would come by our house looking for food. This was mainly because our front door was always open, literally and figuratively. Ma Ame believed that no one should ever go hungry if she had food on her stove. She shared this opinion with many of the other Bain Town women. It was a woman's job to make sure that everyone was fed.

We had supper promptly at six. This gave us enough time to eat so that we would be ready when the evening news came on at seven. It was just Ma Ame and me tonight. Aunt Claudia was at church. After we ate, I went into the kitchen to clean the dishes. This was another one of my supper duties.

"Come in the front room Sheba, the evening news is about to come on. Mind the foreigners will come into this country and know more about it than you do!" I am a foreigner, I thought to myself.

Robert Johnson, manager of Freeport casino is wanted in the US for tax evasion.

"I don't know why it's not enough for people to be corrupt in their own country. They have to take it to the U.S. and mess things up for the rest of us," said Ma Ame.

A sloop was located on the shores of Abaco early this morning around 2 a.m. The vessel contained 10 Haitians. 3 women, 4 children, and 3 men.

Noise from what sounded like a large truck outside interrupted the news reporter.

"Who could be making so much noise at this kind of time?" Ma Ame said as she struggled to lift herself out of her rocking chair. She pulled her night dress out of her behind as she made her way to the front door. Of course Miss Cissy was already making her way over to our house to gossip about what was going on. Everything was an event to her. It gave her a reason to spend most of her time yappin' on the phone.

"Looks like the Raymond's are movin' in across the street," Ma Ame mumbled as men lifted furniture off of the truck.

"Who the hell is this makin' all this god-damn noise outside Thompson fine house tonight?" I knew it was only a matter of time before "loud for no reason" came out of his house to do his inspection. He was an officer with no badge. Thompson began walking toward us to see if we were as surprised as him.

"Lord look what The Bahamas is coming to! Haitians moving in across the street. They can't come 'round here!" He looked at Ma Ame, and then Miss Cissy with horror in his eyes.

"They say Lynden Pindling is a Haitian you know. Well he was born here, but his ma and them are Haitians," Miss Cissy said.

"Lies! Pindling just as much Bahamian as you and me." I heard my history teacher say that he was actually Jamaican, but I wasn't about to say anything in a grown folks conversation.

"They putting their chil'ren in our schools, havin' baby in our hospitals, startin' their own church, puttin' all kinda hex on people, and now they want to move in our side of the neighbourhood? The devil is a liar and so is his mother." As Thompson put on a show, I looked over to his front door and saw Miss Marjorie staring at the mother of the Raymond family. For a few moments, she stared back at her and then looked away.

We hadn't heard from Miss Marjorie since she came here last week with a black eye. If Aunt Claudia was here, she would never let Thompson even look in the direction of our house. Miss Cissy and Ma Ame were acting like they did not know that Thompson was a devil. Miss Cissy had to know because she knew the business of everyone who lived on the island, and of course Ma Ame knew because she nursed Miss Marjorie's wounds. I didn't understand and standing outside with them wasn't going to help me so I went inside to take a bath before the water pressure got too low.

October 6, 1966

When Sheba told me that Thompson was in our yard last night, I was livid. I don't understand my aunty. A woman is beaten by her husband and she and juicy mouth Cissy have the nerve to act like they don't know. I love my aunt, but I don't love all of her ways. I asked her to stop talking to Thompson the first time Miss Marge knocked on our door after Thompson put his hands on her. Aun'Ame said that it had nothing to do with us. What happened between man and wife was between man and God. Well Marge comes here every time it happens so in my book that makes it our business. As a social worker, I know just about every woman in the neighbourhood whose husband beats her. Some of them are beaten until they're blue, lips and eyes swollen. But they don't want to leave because they do not have anywhere else to go. Or they were told by their mothers that it is their cross to bear.

But Thompson, I know, beats his wife because she is half-Haitian.

Her sister is Saraphina Raymond, Jonas' wife. Jonas owns Boyer's, the neighbourhood convenience store. Everyone knows Thompson married Marge because she is beautiful. She is light-skinned, has long, wavy hair, and a small cute nose. Nobody knows what she did before she married Thompson, but she always wears pretty cotton dresses. Sometimes they have polka dots and other times flowers. She wears her hair pinned up like the women in those Hollywood movies. Even with all her beauty, Marge still isn't safe from Thompson's hand, or whatever his choice of weapon is. Thompson is an expert on all things Bahamian. Or so he claims. How he didn't know that Marge was half-Haitian before hand is beyond me. But Marge changed her name from Marjorie Solaine to Margerie Rolle. To her, this looked more Bahamian and she did not want people to know that she was Haitian.

When Marge changed her name, she and her sister went from heartstrings to barely speaking at all. Saraphina did not approve of her abandoning her Haitian identity. Marge would see her sister in town and wouldn't so much as glance her way. She wanted to, but she had already married Thompson. She didn't work, but she cooked and cleaned every day. She made sure Thompson's dinner was ready and on the table when he came home from work.

Chicken with peas and rice on Monday.

Pea soup with dumpling on Tuesday.

Boiled fish on Wednesday.

But he's still ashamed of her. Now that her sister lived across from her, I wonder if things will change. I work with Saraphina. She's a social worker too.

"Sara I don't know how you can watch your sister suffer and not do anything about it. Especially with the women we see come in here."

"She wasn't thinking about us when she left and married that ass-hole of a man. Our mother was sick and we were poor. She was depending on the money Marjorie would make to get her help. She didn't even come to her funeral when she died. She deserves it."

I knew she doesn't mean that. Women with low self-worth are always their own worst enemies. This is why I had to do something about Sheba. She's my baby. Always has and always will be. Sheba literally lights up every room she entered. Her hair is gold and when the sun hits it at the right angle, it shines like a diamond. Her eyes were the same colour, but they don't shine

like her hair. Only when she smiled, and this is rare. She has a dimple in the left of her cream coloured face. I try not to think of her father when I look at it.

She is a scrawny girl. An innocent scrawny. The innocence of hips that haven't yet widened.

Her mother drowned in a sea of ugly, a concrete slab tied to her ankles. Pecola was ugly because the city smeared its waste all over her body and put her on display.

But Sheba is beautiful and I refuse to let her be sullied.

May 2, 1965

Six pairs of eyes were fixed on me as I sat in Shorty's Barbershop. I was used to being staring at because being albino meant I looked different from everyone else. But I knew that when I walked out of this shop, I would not look the same as when I came in. What made it worse was that the little Haitian boy who just moved in across the street, the one who was staring at me in Boyer's, was once again watching me. I think I heard his mother call him Yanick.

Two days ago, as I combed my long hair, strands of gold fell to the floor. I couldn't breathe as I saw chunks of hair wrapped around the teeth of the comb. Now, all I can hear is the sound of the barber laying out his tools. Aunt Claudia sat in one of the chairs by the door reading a magazine. She didn't even glance at me or offer any words of encouragement. I think she was happy that my hair fell out because I disobeyed her.

The barber draped the black cape across my chest. It was heavy, flattening the little breasts that I had. I had just started "bumping" a few months ago while some girls in my class breasts had already begun to drop. They would stand in front of the mirror in the bathroom and unbutton their shirts. Then they would put a pencil under everyone's right breast and if it stuck, it meant you were a woman. I wasn't a woman.

The buzz of the shaver reminded me where I was. I wanted to cry, but I didn't want Yanick to see me.

"Are you ready yellow girl?" A scream was lodged in the back of my throat. Some recognition from my Aunt would have made me feel better, but it was obvious she wanted me to suffer through this. First Mr. Morley combed out my dry, brittle permed ends using his pick with the black fist and silver teeth. I was sure I looked as if I was electrocuted. Yanick probably thought I was the ugliest thing ever. Then he sprayed my hair with water so that the permed ends would fall limp. The harsh sound of blades punctured my ears as I saw little pieces of my hair fall onto the cape and slide down to the floor. With each snip, my eyes welled. Finally, a single tear slid down my right cheek, but pride prevented me from wiping it away.

December 16, 1965

"A liar is a thief, and a thief is a murderer". Ma Ame's words echoed in my head as I looked down at the makeup in the bathroom sink. I knew that taking something that did not belong to me without permission was a bad thing to do, but I didn't think that it made me a murderer. Besides, this was more important than anything in the world. The short afro I now had made me look like a boy. I could hardly tell the difference. Boys didn't have hair, neither did I. They didn't have breasts, neither did I. They didn't have wide hips, neither did I. I heard Miss Cissy say once that a woman needs wide hips to get a man and thick thighs keep him close. How was I supposed to find a boyfriend when I looked like one?

That's why I had to steal the makeup. Because Aunt Claudia sure was not going to buy it for me. Taped to the wall was a picture of Diana Ross. I hoped to look like her by the time I was done even though I had no idea what I was doing. I stole concealer, powder, a powder puff, blush, mascara, red lipstick, a bag of makeup sponges, and a magazine to show me how to apply it. I started with the foundation. *Place a dime-sized amount of foundation onto a sponge and dab onto face. Rub until smooth.* I poured out too much foundation onto the sponge and it spilled onto the sink. When I tried to wipe it up with a sponge, it only spread farther and covered the white counter top streaks of brown. I put the concealer on my face until it was 'smooth' and then moved on to powder. *Rub powder puff onto powder in circular motions press it onto face.* This part was less messy than the first step. Next was blush. You're not a woman unless you have blush. *Gently rub brush over blush and tap off excess. Rub onto apples of cheek and slide brush upwards diagonally.* I forgot to get a brush so I placed three of my fingers together and followed the directions. I didn't need the directions to put on the mascara and lipstick because I'd seen women do it on TV a lot of times. First you open your mouth, and then put it on. Simple as that. I slid the red lipstick across my lips and smushed them together. I couldn't really see what I looked like because the light in the bathroom was dim and oddly placed away from the mirror.

When I was done, I took a wet towel and wiped off the dried lotion that had squirted out of the bottle and onto the mirror earlier that morning. Aunt Claudia hated when I didn't clean up after myself so I figured if I did it now, I wouldn't forget to do it later. The mirror was hanging onto the wall by a thin nail and as I wiped, it rocked from left to right as it usually did. I put all the makeup into a plastic bag and bent down to place it under the sink. No one ever went under there and even if Aunt Claudia did, there were three other plastic bags under there that looked exactly the same. She wouldn't notice anything.

The next thing I heard was the sound of plastic hitting the bathroom tile. The mirror fell all the time and usually nothing happened to it, but this time when I picked it up, there were two cracks that broke the mirror into three pieces. Aunt Claudia is going to kill me, I thought. I picked the mirror up and now that I was directly under the light so I could examine my work. I looked nothing like Diana Ross. My face was broken into three sections and it was two shades darker than the rest of my body. The red lipstick made my teeth look more yellow than they already did, and the mascara made me look a racoon. On both sides of my face, there were three smudged lines of pink stretching from my nose to my ears.

I could feel the familiar sting in the back of my eyes. I knocked the toothbrush holder shuffling my way to the side of the toilet in search of tissue. I wanted to desperately to get this makeup off my face. I dragged the tissue across my eyes, smearing blackness down my face. It

wasn't coming off fast enough. The lump in my throat was growing as I continued to wipe my face fiercely. Finally, I just splashed my face with water and rubbed as hard I could. With my hands covering my face, the tears began to fall. I couldn't tell where the water began and where my tears ended.

January 10, 1967

On this day, elections were held and resulted in a tie between two parties as both received eighteen House of Assembly seats. The leader of the party that wins the most seats becomes Premier. Because both men had been successful in obtaining seats, both parties tried to convince Randol Fawkes, who ran as Labour representative, and Alvin R. Braynen, who ran as an Independent candidate, to join their parties. Randol Fawkes joined the PLP giving the party nineteen seats. The black majority Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), led by Lynden Pindling, won the election against the white majority United Bahamian Party (UBP).

I had a decent sized afro now. The piece at the front stretched all the way to my cupid's bow. Aunt Claudia put it in twists for me to keep it out of the way. At school they alled me "million twist girl" even though I wasn't the only girl who had her hair in twists.

Everybody at school was talking about PLPs victory over the UBP. The entire country was talking about it in excitement.

I sat by myself at lunchtime and ate leftover okra soup Ma Ame made last night. Ms. Knowles warms my food up for me in the staff room microwave. She treats me special because she feels sorry for me. I even feel sorry for me. Ma Ame told me this morning that would be the last day she would be cooking my food for lunch. She said it was abomination to God for a girl my age to not be able to cook. Next year, I would prepare something the night before or I would eat 'slam bam' every day for lunch. I asked her what 'slam bam' was and after mumbling something about American children, she said, "ham and bread".

"I like your million twists." I hadn't even noticed that someone had sat down on the bench next to me. I didn't say anything.

"So you can't talk then?"

"I can speak quite fine. Thank you."

"So then why didn't you answer me the first time?"

"My aunt told me not to talk to strangers." I wanted to bite my tongue. I was being mean to him, but I had no idea why.

"So that's why you always sit here by yourself?" The truth was I wished someone, anyone, would say hello to me. Now that someone was actually saying it, I felt awkward and I didn't know what to say.

I saw Yanick for the first time that day in Boyer's when I was about to steal my favorite red and yellow candy. Everyone else was going about their business, but not him. He was watching me. It made skin heat up and I'm almost positive he noticed how red I got. The second time I saw him was when his family moved in across the street from us. He didn't see me that night, but I could see him clearly. He stood under the street light and, from what I could tell, he had his eyes on Thompson. It seems as if he knew that he was saying something negative about Haitians. Everyone on this side of the hill knew how Thompson felt about Haitians. He made no point to hide his feelings. I saw Yanick again in the barbershop when Aunt Claudia made me get

my hair cut off. He smiled at me when Aunt Claudia and I were leaving the shop. I couldn't tell if he found it funny that I had no hair or if it was something else.

Shortly after Yanick's family moved across the street from us, he moved to my elementary school. I heard that his mother home schooled him before he came to our school. All the girls liked Yanick when he came. Never one to shy away from something that she wants, Rachel immediately tried to make her mark on him. She tried to claim him as her boyfriend until she heard him speak.

Yanick never spoke in his Haitian accent after that.

I never talked to him, but I have to admit that I wanted to. He was beautiful. Not beautiful in the sense that I thought he was handsome. He wasn't ugly, but there was something about him. His skin was as black as the night and smooth as marble. He was taller than all of the other boys. And bigger too. I always wondered why he never threatened to beat up the boys who picked on him. He could surely take them.

"I drew you a picture," Yanick said. I stared at him as he zipped open his bag and pulled out a white piece of paper. He placed it in front of me face down. "Flip it over." Just as I was reaching for it, the bell rang and we had to go back to our classrooms. "I'll see you later," Yanick said and ran back to his class.

It wasn't until Yanick left that I realized Yanick spoke to me in his Haitian accent. I think he used few a creole words and had to correct himself when he realized that I did not understand what he was saying.

I did not flip the white paper over. I placed the piece of paper in a folder in my bag. I had to get back to class because Ms. Knowles said if anyone came back late, she would beat them in front of whole school.

July 10, 1967

I could hear Aunt Claudia's voice as soon as I walked into the house that afternoon. I could see her through the kitchen door. Her back was facing me and she was leaning on the fridge using her right arm. In her left hand was the telephone. It was 3:30 p.m. and Aunt Claudia was never home at this time.

"What do you mean she's in the hospital? She just got out 4 months ago." She was pacing the floor. "The doctor said what? Tell that doctor I'll sue him blind! You hear me?" She slammed the phone onto the receiver and leaned over the sink. The sun shone brightly on one side of her body, casting a shadow on the part of her that faced me. I treaded lightly into the kitchen and as I got about halfway to her she turned around.

"Hi Sheba," she said with a sigh. "How was school? Come," she beckoned and held me to her bosom.

"What's wrong Auntie?"

"Your grammy's in the hospital again." We stood in silence as Auntie began to hum.

"Aunty?"

"Yes Sheba."

"Are you listening for the wind?"

"Yea baby," she said rubbing my back, "but I don't hear nothin'."

Aunt Claudia said that we left Ohio because the wind wasn't singing anymore. She said the air was flat and stale and that there was no life in Ohio. Things always died, she said. She told me that she and Aunt Frieda planted marigold seeds a few days after I was born. They sang a song, said a prayer, and hoped that I lived. She said that the wind blew a soft song across her lips when she pressed the dirt on top of the seeds.

She knew I would survive when the marigolds bloomed, but when they died before the others did, she knew we had to move from Ohio. Now because Gra'Mable is in the hospital, Aunty want to go back and I'd been waiting for a long time for Aunt Claudia to take me back to Ohio to see my real mother and grandmother. She said there wasn't anything in Ohio for me. I didn't know what she meant by that. The only reason she was letting me go back to Ohio with her was because school was closed and she didn't trust anyone to take care of me. Of course Ma Ame came with us too. "I can't let them doctors do no fool with my one sister," she said.

We were taking a boat to Miami and then from Miami to Ohio. The only other time I'd been on a boat and on a plane was when Aunt Claudia and I came here about five years ago. I remember being afraid to live in a new place, but slightly excited because Aunt Claudia promised she would let me go outside more. For some reason, she, Aunt Frieda, and Gra'Mable thought it was best to keep me inside and away from all the other children.

A few Sundays ago, Aunt Claudia and I went down to the "The Fry" to get some conch salad. I looked forward to the Sunday afternoons we spent together. She would tell me about her week and I would tell her about mine.

"I have a confession to make Aunty." She pretended not to hear me and continued to eat. I know she hear me though because her left eyebrow was raised.

"I stole some makeup from Boyer's." I paused to see what she would say, but she didn't say anything. All I heard was the wind carrying a plastic cup across the pavement. "Aren't you going to row me?"

"And what good would that do?" Now it was my turn to say nothing. "Sheba, you know the difference between wrong and right. What do you want me to say? I can't tell you anything that your conscience ain't already told you." She was right, I knew exactly what I did when I stole, but I thought I would at least tell her why.

"I just wanted to feel beautiful. You have no idea what it's like to look like me. Even though you have dreadlocks and some people think that's ugly, at least you have long hair. Your skin is the same colour as theirs. I'm always 'that yellow girl' or 'that girl with the curry hair' or 'that girl who always got on a hat.'"

"Girl, I don't know why you think you so ugly. You have no idea what ugly looks like. Ugly is stealing makeup from Boyer's. Ugly is being jealous of someone because you don't have what they do. Ugly is what Thompson does to Miss Marjorie. Ugly is what they did to Mis' Cissy's husband. Ugly is a state of mind. Ugly people think ugly thought and do ugly things. God don't like ugly Sheba. You may look different but as long you keep thinking you're ugly, you'll always see yourself that way and so will everyone else."

July 23, 1967

I work for the Ministry of Social Services as a social worker. I see mostly elementary school students referred to me when a child's needs are more than what a school can provide. Last week, a small girl with long plaits down to her waist came into my office. I could see the fear in her yes. What I read in her file was enough to make a grown man cry, but no one was crying for her. My voice recorder clicked as I pressed the start button. I preferred not to write notes in front of my younger clients because it made them feel as if they were in trouble. I wanted her to feel as comfortable as possible.

"Hi Sherry, my name is Ms. Claudia MacTeer, but you can call me Ms. Claudia." She sat down on the chair. "Do you know why you're here?"

"Ms. Symonette told my mummy to bring me here after school because I did something bad."

"Yea? What did you do?"

"This boy in my class, Jeremy, he told me to put his thing in my mouth and suck on it like a popsicle. I didn't think anything was wrong with doing it so I did."

"Where did you learn how to do that Sherry?"

"My sister and my brother do it."

"Oh. Does you big sister have a boyfriend?" She shook her head from left to right. "Who does she do it to?"

"My brother." The air was sucked out of my lungs. I struggled to breathe. I wasn't looking at Sherry any longer. Sheba was sitting in front of me. My mind began to flash back to Ohio. After Sheba's mother, Pecola, lost her mind, I didn't talk to anybody. Not even Frieda. I was angry with Pecola's mom and I wished someone would murder her father.

Sheba lived with us for a while after Pecola's father went to jail and her grandmother went to live with the white people she worked for. She was a strange looking baby. She was pink but Pecola and her father were very dark. She had little orange hairs above her ears and very light brown eyes, almost like curry. Albino is what they called her. She barely cried and slept most of the time. She didn't even have a name. My mother told me not to name her because it meant we would have to keep her. "Now I got to find more milk for this baby. First it was Pecola drinking all my milk, now it's her baby," she said. I named her anyway. I spent weeks in the Bible, the only book I owned, searching for a name. "Dark am I, yet lovely." Those were the words spoken by Queen Sheba. Pecola's baby was not dark, but Pecola was and I thought it fitting to name the baby with Pecola in mind.

She slept in our room with Frieda and me. One night, I awoke from my sleep to find the baby staring at me. I smiled and whispered Sheba to her. She smiled and began to reach for me. Sheba she was and Sheba she is. I vowed to take her out of Ohio, away from the people who were already plotting for her failure. I never planned to bring her back. Shit. I'm surprised that I even let Sheba come with me back to Ohio. She had been begging to see Pecola since she found out I was not her real mother. I did not want to her to be like Sherry, the girl who now sat in front me. This little girl did not know her grandfather was her father, she did not know that it

was wrong for her brother and sister to have sex with each other, and she did not know it wrong for her father to touch her soft parts when her mother was not around. But Sheba deserved to know the truth now because it will always reveal itself regardless of how much it is suppressed. One day you will forget to push it down, and it will explode. I wanted Sheba to know her story.

When we got to Lorain a few days ago. The doctors said my mother was in stable condition and that I did not need to come all the way up here. That's what they all say until you get the call that your loved one has died. While she slept, I took Sheba down to the house where Pecola and Mrs. Breedlove lived.

"You remember when I told you that your mom was sick Sheba?" I asked Sheba.

"Yea I remember."

"She has a disease in her head."

"So she's crazy?"

"Yes, she has a mental disease."

"Will she know who I am?"

"I don't know." I was beginning to regret my decision. But Sheba will always want to see her mother. The scab needs to be pulled off because Sheba's wounds aren't healed.

When we arrived at the old house, I knocked on the door several times. No answer. The door was open, so I went inside and told Sheba to stay outside.

"Mrs. Breedlove?" I heard a creaking noise and I saw her in the kitchen sitting on a rocking chair. When she saw me her rocking chair was still. So many things were said in silence as we stared into each other's eyes.

"What do you want?" I swallowed the lump in my throat.

"It's been a long time. How've you been?"

"How it look like I been girl?" The house smelled like old food.

"I brought Pecola's daughter to see her," I replied switching my weight from one leg to the next.

"And why the fuck would you do that? I don't wanna see that child!" she snapped.

"I brought her to see her Pecola not you." She spit into a silver bowl on the floor. I swallowed the bile that I threw up in my mouth.

"She's in the back room. Five minutes and then get the hell out my house." I was afraid.

October 1, 1967

I could hear Thompson outside talking with Ma Ame and Miss Cissy about whether or not the Raymond's are legal Bahamians. I stood naked in front of the full-length mirror in Ma'Ame's bathroom, lights off, no sound but water dripping from the leaky faucet. My skin feels raw. I keep trying to wash Ohio off of me. I haven't spoken a word in days. Just murmurs and gestures. *You better start talkin' girl before I make you talk.* Ma'Ame has said different versions of that phrase to me every day since I stop talking. Words don't make sense anymore, so I don't use them.

I wish I never went to that place. I was afraid to enter that woman's house. That woman was my grandmother. I didn't know that at the time. Aunt Claudia told me to stand behind her when we got to her house. It was so dilapidated that it was leaning. Aunt Claudia was fidgeting and Aunty doesn't fidget. She looked back at me from inside the house and motioned for me to come inside. I took a deep breath and put one foot inside the house. My other foot followed. *Why she pale like that?* Her voice was raspy and echoed through the little house. She looked like the devil's mother. *The child is white.* I wished I'd stayed outside and I think Aunty wished she left me at home. When she came out of the kitchen she held out her finger, as if to say wait, and disappeared behind a wall. *You ugly just like your mother. Shoulda killed your ass. Maybe I would still have my man.* Heat began to rise from the bottom of my feet to my ears. Why did Aunt Claudia leave me out here with this woman? I didn't know how to act, think, or feel.

I was afraid of her and disturbed by how much my eyes were like hers. They were shaped like mine or maybe mine were shaped like hers. They were yellow though, the kind of yellow that made you afraid. I was definitely afraid of her. If she didn't look like she was stuck to the chair she was sitting on, I don't believe she wouldn't have tried to hurt me. I just wanted to see my mother and leave.

When Aunty came back to get me, there was a glaze over her eyes.

"Okay Sheba. Before I let you see your mommy, I just want you to know that -"

"I just want to see her okay..." She wiped the tear that slid down my cheek took my hand. The walls of the hallway were a mosaic of dingy tan, yellow, and green. Hanging on one side of the wall was a picture of a young man. He was very dark but his smile was white. In fact, his smile looked just like mine, skewed to the left with a dimple on his left cheek.

Nothing could prepare me for what I was about to see. There was little light in the room, only enough for me to see where to place my feet. There was no furniture just a scratched up table by the door. A thick layer of dust covered it and a rusty copper-coloured lantern that looked as old as me sat on top of the dust. There was a dead silence. My mother was lying down on an old pink mattress with foam sticking out through its fibers. Her attention was fixed on the chipped paint on the wall.

"Pecola, I have someone that I want you to see..." Aunt Claudia looked at me hesitantly. "...someone who wants to see you." She didn't move. Aunty gestured for me to come in front of my mother's eyes. "Bend down so she can see you." I stood in front of her for a few seconds

before her eyes rolled from the wall to me. Sporadic humming sounds came from her throat. Aunty smiled a little so I let out the breath that I'd been holding in.

"What should I say?"

"Whatever you want."

"Um...okay...Hi...um...Pecola...or I guess I can call you mommy. My name is Sheba and I'm 12-years-old. I like to eat mangoes and..." Those were the only words I managed to get out.

"Go on Sheba." I felt stupid, like I didn't know what to say to my own mother. She was frail. I felt as if even my words were too heavy for her, like she would collapse under them.

She wore a beige dress that may or may not have been white a few years ago. She lay there in a fetal position, the outline of her knees sticking out through the dress.

Her face was narrow and her cheeks were a bit sucked in. I couldn't believe this was what my mother looked like. She wore a purple scarf around her head and her hair was in little short twists. They looked flattened as if she had slept on them. I got an urge to touch her hair, to see if it felt like mine or to see if a part of me was in her. I decided against that because she had a sadness in here eyes that looked contagious. Her nose was broad and flat, like someone took the index finger and pressed so hard on the tip of it, that it stayed that way. She had bushy eyebrows and eyelashes with hairs that went in all directions. This, with her coffee coloured skin made her look extremely dark. Not to mention the light from the window cast a shadow on her face that only allowed me to see half of it. I hadn't noticed how hot the little room was until I saw how shiny her face was. She looked like she could use a bath.

I thought my mother would be beautiful. That's what Aunty said. I thought she would have long hair and bright eyes. I thought she would be able to stand and hug me. I wanted to feel her. I wanted her to know me and I wanted to know her. I imagined we'd have a conversation about our lives. She would ask me what grade I was in and I would tell her seventh. She would ask me what my favourite Bible verse was and I would say John 3:16. I would ask her what she liked to do and she would say she liked to read. I would ask her what and she would say poetry. We would both like the same kind of music, the same kind of food. We would laugh the same way, stand the same way and dance the same way. I wanted sameness and familiarity, but the only thing I saw of me in her was a hollow space in the middle of her lip that was that was identical to mine.

Now, I didn't know what to say to my image in the mirror. I held the picture Yanick drew up in front of my face. I hadn't seen him in a while, but I looked at this picture everyday for the past week. I couldn't tell if his drawing was supposed to be me or not.

The girl in the picture was beautiful. Her hair was short like mine, her eyes were brown like mine, her skin was pale like mine, and her lips were big like mine. But she looked nothing like me. She wore a gold crown with green jewels on it. I looked back my reflection. I had no crown, just my hair that had grown out into a small afro. *A woman's hair is her crown and glory.* Ma Ame told me this every morning. She was trying to get me to speak.

Every time I opened my mouth, I felt like the air was being sucked out of it. I would have flashbacks of my mother. Of how after a few minutes of being in the same room as her, I couldn't bare it. I hadn't taken Aunt Claudia as serious as I should have when she said that my mother was sick. I'd seen sick people before, but I was caught off guard. My heart began to beat fast and my stomach felt queasy. Without any warning, I sprang up off my knees, knocked over the lantern on the table, and ran out of the house. "Don't come back," the old woman

shouted at me. I could feel it coming up. The chicken and grits that I'd had for lunch shot up my body and out of my mouth onto the ground. I clutched my stomach as I lost control of my body. Aunt Claudia came out of the house shortly after asking if I was okay.

"Why'd you bring me here!" I screamed, eyes watery from throwing up.

"I...I...I thought..."

"I want to go home," I whispered, falling into her arms. She held my head against her bosom and kissed it. I cried myself to sleep that night and woke up in a puddle of my own tears.

Our first night back in Nassau we had pea soup and dumpling for dinner, Ma Ame put extra salt beef in my bowl because she knew that was my favourite part. Her efforts to make me feel better were not working.

"Aunt Claudia, why did that old woman say she wish she had killed me?" I couldn't call her my grandmother anymore. She didn't answer me. She continued to slurp up her soup as if I didn't exist. I was jealous of her her soup because it was getting the attention I craved.

"Sheba, how was school today?"

"School was fine." Her spoon made a loud clink as it fell to her empty bowl. She rubbed her temples as if to say I was bothering her.

"Sheba I don't know."

"And did she say she would still have her man if she did?"

"I don't know Sheba."

"Who was that man in the picture on the wall with the smile like mine?"

"Sheba I do not know!" I jerked when Aunt Claudia slammed her hands on the table as she got up.

"Well what do you know? You said it was okay for me to go to Ohio. You said you were going to answer my questions about my mother. Now you don't know?"

"That's it lil' girl! Just who do you think you talkin to like that? I won't take this type of back talk in my house. When you could turn key in your own door you can do as you please, but you must respect your elders!" Ma Ame shouted at me with fire in her eyes.

Aunt Claudia had decided that she wasn't talking so I decided that I wouldn't either. I didn't speak for the rest of the summer and when school re-opened, I barely talked to my teachers. They complained to Aunt Claudia and I didn't care one bit. I couldn't tell if I was still being teased or not because I felt like all the other children didn't even exist

Now, I was beginning to grow tired of my silence. I was become loud and heavy. I studied my body in the mirror, still wet from the bath I'd taken minutes ago. I squeezed my arms, dug my fingers in to my flesh. Then I moved on to my breasts, squeezed them, and stared at my honey coloured nipples. I brought both hands down to my stomach and let them linger down to my ass. I grabbed that too. Lifted it up. Twisted it. Let it fall back down. I looked at my eyes and I saw my grandmother. I looked at the dimple in my left cheek and I saw the man in the picture on the wall. I look at the cleft in the middle of my bottom lip and I saw my mother. The picture that Yanick drew for me was supposed to be me. I was supposed to be beautiful.

"I am more than *that*. I am beautiful." It was a whisper, barely the sound of the breeze that blew past the bathroom window, but they were the first words I'd spoken in weeks.

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