English I Summer Reading Assignment

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Purpose & Overview

HOMEWORK?! Over the SUMMER?!

It's true that doing homework during your break can be frustrating. However, it is important to do *something* over the summer so that we can be well prepared in the fall. Here are some reasons why we are completing this summer reading project:

- To keep your mind active during the summer
- To introduce you to the rigor of work in high school English
- To give you the opportunity to read well-known and popular writers
- To preview the stories that we will be studying during the school year
- To give your teacher an idea of your reading and writing abilities at the beginning of the school year

For this assignment, you are required to:

Step 1: Read
Pick the 5 stories you will read this summer.

Step 2: Annotate
Be sure each story is thoroughly annotated.

Step 3: Engage
Choose three tasks from the Choice Menu to complete (one must be writing an OER!).

Where do I get the stories?

Available to you for free are all of the short stories in this packet. If you would like to print out the entire packet, feel free to do so. If you would prefer to first look through the packet online, select the stories you want to read, and ONLY print those, that is another great option.

Required Summer Reading Assignment (checklist)

☐ **Access** this summer reading packet online and print, if possible.

☐ **Choose** the five stories that interest me.

☐ **Read** and annotate

- o Story One:_____
  - ▪ Complete by:_____
- o Story Two:_____
  - ▪ Complete by:_____
- o Story Three:_____
  - ▪ Complete by:_____
- o Story Four: _____
  - ▪ Complete by:_____
- o Story Five:_____
  - ▪ Complete by: _____

☐ **Choice Menu** assignments:

- o Task One: **Open-Ended Response (OER)**
  - ▪ Complete by:_____
- o Task Two:_____
  - ▪ Complete by: _____
- o Task Three:_____
  - ▪ Complete by:_____

Additional Recommended Summer Reading

*Below is a list of **favorite books** chosen by Ms. Middleton and Ms. Thornton. Reading one (or more!) of these books during your summer break is optional, but **highly encouraged**.*

Title	Author
Caucasia	Danzy Senna
Coffee Will Make You Black	April Sinclair
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep	Philip K. Dick
The Book of Unknown Americans	Cristina Henriquez
The Golden Compass	Philip Pullman
What I Saw and How I Lied	Judy Blundell

Before Reading: Choose Your Short Stories

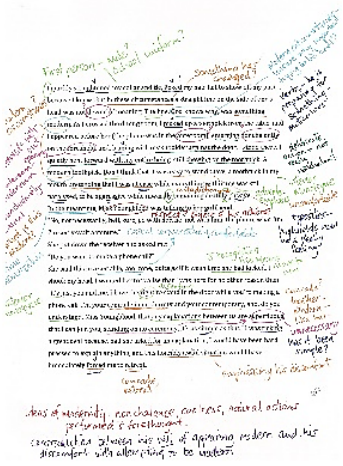
*** * * Many of these short stories have audio versions on YouTube! * * ***

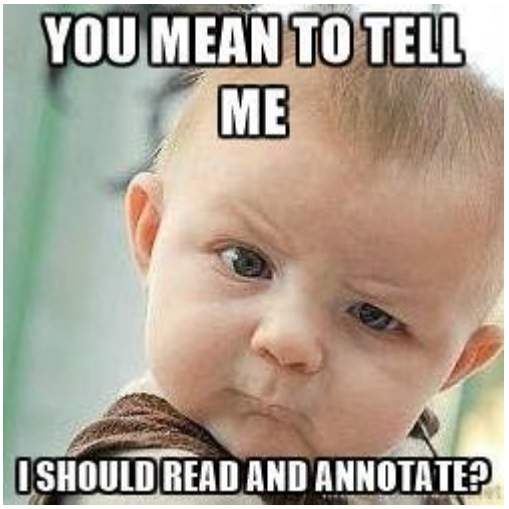
During Reading: Annotating

The purpose of annotation is to **notice** interesting and/or important information. You should start by **underlining** things that stand out to you. Then, you should **write a brief phrase or sentence** about what you are noticing in the margins. A well-annotated story will have **5+ annotations per page.**

Many of us already annotate for **main idea**. In addition, you should be annotating for the things below:

- **Characters**
  - *Circle names of new characters*
  - *Underline important actions, thoughts, or descriptions*
  - *Jot down character traits*
  - *Notice the way characters change*
- **Setting**
  - *Circle the names of important places*
  - *Underline descriptions of the setting*
  - *Jot down words to describe the setting*
  - *Notice places where the setting impacts the plot*
- **Literary Devices**
  - *Underline examples of literary devices*
  - *Jot down the TYPE of literary device you notice. Examples of literary devices:*
    - Metaphors, similes, and personification
    - Imagery
    - Foreshadowing
    - Symbolism
    - Diction
  - *Identify the mood or tone the author creates with the literary device*
- **New Vocabulary**
  - *Circle words you don't know and look up definitions in the dictionary (online dictionaries are fine!)*
- **Theme**
  - *Underline evidence of BIG IDEAS in the short story*
  - *Jot down possible themes, or universal messages, as you read*
- **Connections**
  - *Underline moments that remind you of:*
    - Other texts you have read
    - Movies / TV shows
    - Historical events
    - Current events
    - Personal experiences
  - *Jot down what the moment reminds you of and why*
- **Questions**
  - *Underline things that are confusing*
  - *Write down questions you have about what is going on*
  - *Write down a question you would want to ask the character or the author*





After Reading: Choice Menu

***Directions**: Complete **THREE** options on the menu below **<u>in total</u>** (NOT THREE FOR EACH STORY!)*

You MUST write an EBAP!
Choose one of the prompts below.

Choose <u>a total of two</u> options from these two lists.

EBAP	ANALYTICAL	ARTISTIC
Write a paragraph (5+ sentences) that answers **one** of the questions below and uses **<u>textual evidence</u>** to prove the answer. Be sure to include the *title* of the text, the *author*, and the *character's name* in your response. • **How is one character changed or affected by the conflict in this story?** • **What is one theme (universal message) the author portrays in this short story?** • **How is the character in this short story similar to another character from a text you have read?**	**Venn Diagram** On white paper, draw a Venn Diagram (two overlapping circles) to compare and contrast **TWO** of the short stories. You must include 3+ similarities and 3+ differences on your Venn Diagram, written in complete sentence.	**Character Portrait** On white paper, draw one of the characters in the story. Around the drawing, write 5+ character traits and text evidence (quotes from the story) to justify each trait you chose.
	Write a Letter On notebook paper, write a letter to a character in one of the stories. Your letter could include your thoughts/ opinions about his/her actions in the story, questions for him/her, or advice for him/her in the future. Your letter should be at least ¾ of a page long.	**Movie Poster** Imagine that this short story was being made into a movie (or TV show). On white paper, create a poster to advertise the movie. Use color to represent images from the story, and include the names of which actors will be starring as the main characters.
	Alternative Ending On notebook paper, write a <u>different ending</u> for the story. Your writing should attempt to sound similar to the author's writing style and be at least ½ a page long.	**Music Lyrics** How could this story be turned into a song? You can take existing song lyrics and change them to be about the story of your choice OR you could write your own original lyrics for a song!

Character Traits List

absent-minded
adventurous
ambitious
awkward
boastful
bold
bossy
brave
busy
calm
carefree
careless
caring
cautious
changeable
charming
cheerful
clever
conceited
confused
considerate
contented
cooperative
courageous
cowardly
creative
cruel
curious
dainty
daring
demanding
dependable
determined
disagreeable
dreamy
dull
energetic
fearful
fierce
fighter
forgetful
forgiving
friendly
fun-loving
funny
fussy
generous
gentle
gloomy
greedy
gullible
handsome
happy
hard-working
helpful
honest
humble
humorous
imaginative
independent
intelligent
inventive
jolly
joyful
kind
lazy
leader
loud
lovable
loving
loyal
mannerly
mean
messy
mischievous
nagging
neat
obedient
organized
outspoken
patient
patriotic
playful
pleasant
polite
proud
quarrelsome
quick-tempered
quiet
reasonable
reckless
relaxed
resourceful
respectful
responsible
restless
rude
sad
self-centered
self-confident
selfish
sensitive
sentimental
serious
sharp-witted
shiftless
shrewd
shy
sneaky
soft-hearted
spunky
stern
stingy
stubborn
studious
successful
superstitious
suspicious
talkative
thoughtful
timid
tough
trusting
understanding
unfriendly
unkind
unselfish
wild
wise
witty
zany

** * * Don't know what one of these words means? Look it up! * * **

Tone Words

Tone: what the author feels about the topic, subject, character.

POSITIVE TONE WORDS

admiring
adoring
affectionate
appreciative
approving
bemused
benevolent
blithe
calm
casual
celebratory
cheerful
comforting
comic
compassionate
complimentary
conciliatory
confident
contented
delightful
earnest
ebullient
ecstatic
effusive
elated
empathetic
encouraging
euphoric
excited
exhilarated
expectant
facetious
fervent
flippant
forthright
friendly
funny
gleeful
gushy
happy
hilarious
hopeful
humorous
interested
introspective
jovial
joyful
laudatory
light
lively
mirthful
modest
nostalgic
optimistic
passionate
placid
playful
poignant
proud
reassuring
reflective
relaxed
respectful
reverent
romantic
sanguine
scholarly
self-assured
sentimental
serene
silly
sprightly
straightforward
sympathetic
tender
tranquil
whimsical
wistful
worshipful
zealous

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NEUTRAL
(+, -, or neutral)

commanding
direct
impartial
indirect
meditative
objective
questioning
speculative
unambiguous
unconcerned
understated

NEGATIVE TONE WORDS

abhorring
acerbic
ambiguous
ambivalent
angry
annoyed
antagonistic
anxious
apathetic
apprehensive
belligerent
bewildered
biting
bitter
blunt
bossy
cold
conceited
condescending
confused
cynical
demanding
depressed
derisive
derogatory
desolate
despairing
desperate
detached
diabolic
disappointed
disliking
disrespectful
doubtful
embarrassed
enraged
evasive
fatalistic
fearful
forceful
foreboding
frantic
frightened
frustrated
furious
gloomy
grave
greedy
grim
harsh
hostile
impatient
incredulous
indifferent
indignant
inflammatory
insecure
insolent
irreverent
lethargic
melancholy
mischievous
miserable
mocking
mournful
nervous
ominous
outraged
paranoid
pathetic
patronizing
pensive
pessimistic
pretentious
psychotic
resigned
sarcastic
sardonic
scornful
self-deprecating
selfish
serious
severe
sinister
skeptical
sly
solemn
somber
stern
stressful
suspicious
tense
threatening
tragic
uncertain
uneasy
unfriendly
unsympathetic
upset
violent

Mood Words

Mood: the general feeling that a piece of writing creates within the reader.

POSITIVE MOOD WORDS

amused
awed
bouncy
calm
cheerful
chipper
confident
contemplative
content
determined
dignified
dreamy
ecstatic
empowered
energetic
enlightened
enthralled
excited
exhilarated
flirty
giddy
grateful
harmonious
hopeful
hyper
idyllic
joyous
jubilant
liberating
light-hearted
loving
mellow
nostalgic
optimistic
passionate
peaceful
playful
pleased
refreshed
rejuvenated
relaxed
relieved
satiated
satisfied
sentimental
silly
surprised
sympathetic
thankful
thoughtful
touched
trustful
vivacious
warm
welcoming

NEGATIVE MOOD WORDS

aggravated
annoyed
anxious
apathetic
apprehensive
barren
brooding
cold
confining
confused
cranky
crushed
cynical
depressed
desolate
disappointed
discontented
distressed
drained
dreary
embarrassed
enraged
envious
exhausted
fatalistic
foreboding
frustrated
futile
gloomy
grumpy
haunting
heartbroken
hopeless
hostile
indifferent
infuriated
insidious
intimidated
irate
irritated
jealous
lethargic
lonely
melancholic
merciless
moody
morose
nauseated
nervous
nightmarish
numb
overwhelmed
painful
pensive
pessimistic
predatory
rejected
restless
scared
serious
sick
somber
stressed
suspenseful
tense
terrifying
threatening
uncomfortable
vengeful
violent
worried

** * * Don't know what one of these words means? Look it up! * * **

All Summer in a Day
By Ray Bradbury

"Ready ?"

"Ready."

"Now ?"

"Soon."

"Do the scientists really know? Will it happen today, will it ?"

"Look, look; see for yourself !"

The children pressed to each other like so many roses, so many weeds, intermixed, peering out for a look at the hidden sun.

It rained.

It had been raining for seven years; thousands upon thousands of days compounded and filled from one end to the other with rain, with the drum and gush of water, with the sweet crystal fall of showers and the concussion of storms so heavy they were tidal waves come over the islands. A thousand forests had been crushed under the rain and grown up a thousand times to be crushed again. And this was the way life was forever on the planet Venus, and this was the schoolroom of the children of the rocket men and women who had come to a raining world to set up civilization and live out their lives.

"It's stopping, it's stopping !"

"Yes, yes !"

Margot stood apart from them, from these children who could ever remember a time when there wasn't rain and rain and rain. They were all nine years old, and if there had been a day, seven years ago, when the sun came out for an hour and showed its face to the stunned world, they could not recall. Sometimes, at night, she heard them stir, in remembrance, and she knew they were dreaming and remembering gold or a yellow crayon or a coin large enough to buy the world with. She knew they thought they remembered a warmness, like a blushing in the face, in the body, in the arms and legs and trembling hands. But then they always awoke to the tatting drum, the endless shaking down of clear bead necklaces upon the roof, the walk, the gardens, the forests, and their dreams were gone.

All day yesterday they had read in class about the sun. About how like a lemon it was, and how hot. And they had written small stories or essays or poems about it: *I think the sun is a flower,That blooms for just one hour.* That was Margot's poem, read in a quiet voice in the still classroom while the rain was falling outside.

"Aw, you didn't write that!" protested one of the boys.

"I did," said Margot. "I did."

"William!" said the teacher.

But that was yesterday. Now the rain was slackening, and the children were crushed in the great thick windows.

Where's teacher ?"

"She'll be back."

"She'd better hurry, we'll miss it !"

They turned on themselves, like a feverish wheel, all tumbling spokes. Margot stood alone. She was a very frail girl who looked as if she had been lost in the rain for years and the rain had washed out the blue from her eyes and the red from her mouth

and the yellow from her hair. She was an old photograph dusted from an album, whitened away, and if she spoke at all her voice would be a ghost. Now she stood, separate, staring at the rain and the loud wet world beyond the huge glass.

"What're *you* looking at ?" said William.

Margot said nothing.

"Speak when you're spoken to."

He gave her a shove. But she did not move; rather she let herself be moved only by him and nothing else. They edged away from her, they would not look at her. She felt them go away. And this was because she would play no games with them in the echoing tunnels of the underground city. If they tagged her and ran, she stood blinking after them and did not follow. When the class sang songs about happiness and life and games her lips barely moved. Only when they sang about the sun and the summer did her lips move as she watched the drenched windows. And then, of course, the biggest crime of all was that she had come here only five years ago from Earth, and she remembered the sun and the way the sun was and the sky was when she was four in Ohio. And they, they had been on Venus all their lives, and they had been only two years old when last the sun came out and had long since forgotten the color and heat of it and the way it really was.

But Margot remembered.

"It's like a penny," she said once, eyes closed.

"No it's not!" the children cried.

"It's like a fire," she said, "in the stove."

"You're lying, you don't remember !" cried the children.

But she remembered and stood quietly apart from all of them and watched the patterning windows. And once, a month ago, she had refused to shower in the school shower rooms, had clutched her hands to her ears and over her head, screaming the water mustn't touch her head. So after that, dimly, dimly, she sensed it, she was different and they knew her difference and kept away. There was talk that her father and mother were taking her back to Earth next year; it seemed vital to her that they do so, though it would mean the loss of thousands of dollars to her family. And so, the children hated her for all these reasons of big and little consequence. They hated her pale snow face, her waiting silence, her thinness, and her possible future.

"Get away !" The boy gave her another push. "What're you waiting for?"

Then, for the first time, she turned and looked at him. And what she was waiting for was in her eyes.

"Well, don't wait around here !" cried the boy savagely. "You won't see nothing!"

Her lips moved.

"Nothing !" he cried. "It was all a joke, wasn't it?" He turned to the other children. "Nothing's happening today. *Is* it ?"

They all blinked at him and then, understanding, laughed and shook their heads.

"Nothing, nothing !"

"Oh, but," Margot whispered, her eyes helpless. "But this is the day, the scientists

predict, they say, they *know*, the sun…"

"All a joke !" said the boy, and seized her roughly. "Hey, everyone, let's put her in a closet before the teacher comes !"

"No," said Margot, falling back.

They surged about her, caught her up and bore her, protesting, and then pleading, and then crying, back into a tunnel, a room, a closet, where they slammed and locked the door. They stood looking at the door and saw it tremble from her beating and throwing herself against it. They heard her muffled cries. Then, smiling, the turned and went out and back down the tunnel, just as the teacher arrived.

"Ready, children ?" She glanced at her watch.

"Yes !" said everyone.

"Are we all here ?"

"Yes !"

The rain slacked still more.

They crowded to the huge door.

The rain stopped.

It was as if, in the midst of a film concerning an avalanche, a tornado, a hurricane, a volcanic eruption, something had, first, gone wrong with the sound apparatus, thus muffling and finally cutting off all noise, all of the blasts and repercussions and thunders, and then, second, ripped the film from the projector and inserted in its place a beautiful tropical slide which did not move or tremor. The world ground to a standstill. The silence was so immense and unbelievable that you felt your ears had been stuffed or you had lost your hearing altogether. The children put their hands to their ears. They stood apart. The door slid back and the smell of the silent, waiting world came in to them.

The sun came out.

It was the color of flaming bronze and it was very large. And the sky around it was a blazing blue tile color. And the jungle burned with sunlight as the children, released from their spell, rushed out, yelling into the springtime.

"Now, don't go too far," called the teacher after them. "You've only two hours, you know. You wouldn't want to get caught out !"

But they were running and turning their faces up to the sky and feeling the sun on their cheeks like a warm iron; they were taking off their jackets and letting the sun burn their arms.

"Oh, it's better than the sun lamps, isn't it?"

"Much, much better !"

They stopped running and stood in the great jungle that covered Venus, that grew and never stopped growing, tumultuously, even as you watched it. It was a nest of octopi, clustering up great arms of fleshlike weed, wavering, flowering in this brief spring. It was the color of rubber and ash, this jungle, from the many years without sun. It was the color of stones and white cheeses and ink, and it was the color of the moon.

The children lay out, laughing, on the jungle mattress, and heard it sigh and squeak under them resilient and alive. They ran among the trees, they slipped and fell, they pushed each other, they played hide-and-seek and tag, but most of all they

squinted at the sun until the tears ran down their faces; they put their hands up to that yellowness and that amazing blueness and they breathed of the fresh, fresh air and listened and listened to the silence which suspended them in a blessed sea of no sound and no motion. They looked at everything and savored everything. Then, wildly, like animals escaped from their caves, they ran and ran in shouting circles. They ran for an hour and did not stop running.

And then -

In the midst of their running one of the girls wailed.

Everyone stopped.

The girl, standing in the open, held out her hand.

"Oh, look, look," she said, trembling.

They came slowly to look at her opened palm.

In the center of it, cupped and huge, was a single raindrop. She began to cry, looking at it. They glanced quietly at the sun.

"Oh. Oh."

A few cold drops fell on their noses and their cheeks and their mouths. The sun faded behind a stir of mist. A wind blew cold around them. They turned and started to walk back toward the underground house, their hands at their sides, their smiles vanishing away.

A boom of thunder startled them and like leaves before a new hurricane, they tumbled upon each other and ran. Lightning struck ten miles away, five miles away, a mile, a half mile. The sky darkened into midnight in a flash.

They stood in the doorway of the underground for a moment until it was raining hard. Then they closed the door and heard the gigantic sound of the rain falling in tons and avalanches, everywhere and forever.

"Will it be seven more years ?"

"Yes. Seven."

Then one of them gave a little cry.

"Margot !"

"What ?"

"She’s still in the closet where we locked her."

"Margot."

They stood as if someone had driven them, like so many stakes, into the floor. They looked at each other and then looked away. They glanced out at the world that was raining now and raining and raining steadily. They could not meet each other’s glances. Their faces were solemn and pale. They looked at their hands and feet, their faces down.

"Margot."

One of the girls said, "Well… ?"

No one moved.

"Go on," whispered the girl.

They walked slowly down the hall in the sound of cold rain. They turned through the doorway to the room in the sound of the storm and thunder, lightning on their faces, blue and terrible. They walked over to the closet door slowly and stood by it.

Behind the closet door was only silence.

They unlocked the door, even more slowly, and let Margot out.

ON THE SIDEWALK BLEEDING by Evan Hunter

The boy lay on the sidewalk bleeding in the rain. He was sixteen years old, and he wore a bright purple jacket and the lettering across the back of the jacket read THE ROYALS. The boy's name was Andy and the name was delicately scripted in black thread on the front of the jacket, just over the heart. ANDY.

He had been stabbed ten minutes ago. The knife entered just below his rib cage and had been drawn across his body violently, tearing a wide gap in his flesh. He lay on the sidewalk with the March rain drilling his jacket and drilling his body and washing away the blood that poured from his open wound. He had known excruciating pain when the knife had torn across his body, and then sudden comparative relief when the blade was pulled away. He had heard the voice saying, "That's for you Royal!" and then the sound of footsteps hurrying into the rain, and then he had fallen to the sidewalk, clutching his stomach, trying to stop the flow of blood.

He tried to yell for help, but he had no voice. He did not know why his voice had deserted him, or why there was an open hole in his body from which his life ran readily, steadily, or why the rain had become so suddenly fierce. It was 11:13 p.m. but he did not know the time.

There was another thing he did not know.

He did not know he was dying. He lay on the sidewalk, bleeding, and he thought only: That was a fierce rumble. They got me good that time, but he did not know he was dying. He would have been frightened had he known. In his ignorance he lay bleeding and wishing he could cry out for help, but there was no voice in his throat. There was only the bubbling of blood from between his lips whenever he opened his mouth to speak. He lay in his pain, waiting, waiting for someone to find him.

He could hear the sound of automobile tires hushed on the rain swept streets, far away at the other end of the long alley. He lay with his face pressed to the sidewalk, and he could see the splash of neon far away at the other end of the alley, tinting the pavement red and green, slickly brilliant in the rain.

He wondered if Laura would be angry. He had left the jump to get a package of cigarettes. He had told her he would be back in a few minutes, and then he had gone downstairs and found the candy store closed. He knew that Alfredo's on the next block would be open. He had started through the alley, and that was when he had been ambushed.

He could hear the faint sound of music now, coming from a long, long way off. He wondered if Laura was dancing, wondered if she had missed him yet. Maybe she thought he wasn't coming back. Maybe she thought he'd cut out for good. Maybe she had already left the jump and gone home. He thought of her face, the brown eyes and the jet-black hair, and thinking of her he forgot his pain a little, forgot that blood was rushing from his body.

Someday he would marry Laura. Someday he would marry her, and they would have a lot of kids, and then they would get out of the neighborhood. They would move to a clean project

in the Bronx, or maybe they would move to Staten Island. When they were married, they had kids.

He heard footsteps at the other end of the alley, and he lifted his cheek from the sidewalk and looked into the darkness and tried to cry out, but again there was only a soft hissing bubble of blood on his mouth.

The man came down the alley. He had not seen Andy yet. He walked, and then stopped to lean against the brick of the building, and then walked again. He saw Andy then and came toward him, and he stood over him for a long time, the minutes ticking, ticking, watching him and not speaking.

Then he said, "What's the matter, buddy'?"

Andy could not speak, and he could barely move. He lifted his face slightly and looked up at the man, and in the rain swept alley he smelled the sickening odor of alcohol. The man was drunk.

The man was smiling.

"Did you fall down, buddy?" he asked. "You must be as drunk as I am." He squatted alongside Andy.

'You gonna catch cold there," he said. "What's the matter? You like layin' in the wet?"

Andy could not answer. The rain spattered around them.

You like a drink?"

Andy shook his head.

"I gotta bottle. Here," the man said. He pulled a pint bottle from his inside jacket pocket. Andy tried to move, but pain wrenched him back flat against the sidewalk.

Take it," the man said. He kept watching Andy. "Take it." When Andy did not move, he said, "Nev' mind, I'll have one m'self." He tilted the bottle to his lips, and then wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. "You too young to be drinkin' anyway. Should be 'shamed of yourself, drunk and layin 'in a alley, all wet. Shame on you. I gotta good mind to call a cop."

Andy nodded. Yes, he tried to say. Yes, call a cop. Please call one.

"Oh, you don' like that, huh?" the drunk said. "You don' wanna cop to fin' you all drunk an' wet in an alley, huh: Okay, buddy. This time you get off easy." He got to his feet. "This time you get off easy," he said again. He waved broadly at Andy, and then almost lost his footing. "S'long, buddy," he said.

Wait, Andy thought. Wait, please, I'm bleeding.

"S'long," the drunk said again, "I see you around," and the he staggered off up the alley.

Andy lay and thought: Laura, Laura. Are you dancing:?

The couple came into the alley suddenly. They ran into the alley together, running from the rain, the boy holding the girl's elbow, the girl spreading a newspaper over her head to protect her hair. Andy watched them run into the alley laughing, and then duck into the doorway not ten feet from him.

"Man, what rain!" the boy said. 'You could drown out there."

"I have to get home," the girl said. "It's late, Freddie. I have to get home."

"We got time," Freddie said. 'Your people won't raise a fuss if you're a little late. Not with this with kind of weather."

"It's dark," the girl said, and she giggled.

'Yeah," the boy answered, his voice very low.

"Freddie . . . . ?

"Um?"

"You're ... standing very close to me."

"Um."

There was a long silence. Then the girl said, "Oh," only that single word, and Andy knew she had been kissed , and he suddenly hungered for Laura's mouth. It was then that he wondered if he would ever kiss Laura again. It was then that he wondered if he was dying.

No, he thought, I can't be dying, not from a little street rumble, not from just being cut. Guys get cut all the time in rumbles. I can't be dying. No, that's stupid. That don't make any sense at all.

"You shouldn't," the girl said.

"Why not?"

"Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"So?"

"I don't know."

"I love you, Angela," the boy said.

"I love you, too, Freddie," the girl said, and Andy listened and thought: I love you, Laura. Laura, I think maybe I'm dying. Laura, this is stupid but I think maybe I'm dying. Laura, I think I'm dying

He tried to speak. He tried to move. He tried to crawl toward the doorway. He tried to make a noise, a sound, and a grunt came, a low animal grunt of pain.

"What was that?" the girl said, suddenly alarmed, breaking away from the boy.

"I don't know," he answered.

"Go look, Freddie."

"No. Wait."

Andy moved his lips again. Again the sound came from him.

Freddie!"

"What?"

"I'm scared."

"I'll go see," the boy said.

He stepped into the alley. He walked over to where Andy lay on the ground. He stood over him, watching him.

"You all right?" he asked.

"What is it?" Angela said from the doorway.

"Somebody's hurt," Freddie said.

"Let's get out of here," Angela said.

"No. Wait a minute." He knelt down beside Andy. "You cut?" he asked.

Andy nodded. The boy kept looking at him. He saw the lettering on the jacket then. THE ROYALS. He turned to Angela.

"He's a Royal," he said.

"Let's what. . . .what . . . do you want to do, Freddie?"

"I don't know. I don't know. I don't want to get mixed up in this. He's a Royal. We help him, and the Guardians'll be down on our necks. I don't want to get mixed up in this, Angela."

"Is he . . . is he hurt bad?"

"Yeah, it looks that way."

"What shall we do?"

"I don't know."

"We can't leave him here in the rain," Angela hesitated. "Can we?"

"If we get a copy, the Guardians'll find out who," Freddie said. "I don't know, Angela. I don't know."

Angela hesitated a long time before answering. Then she said, "I want to go home, Freddie. My people will begin to worry."

"Yeah," Freddie said. He looked at Andy again. "You all right?" he asked. Andy lifted his face from the sidewalk, and his eyes said: Please, please help me, and maybe Freddie read what his eyes were saying, and maybe he didn't.

Be hind him, Angela said, "Freddie, let's get out of here! Please!" Freddie stood up. He looked at Andy again, and then mumbled, "I'm sorry." He took Angela's arm and together they ran towards the neon splash at the other end of the alley.

Why, they're afraid of the Guardians, Andy thought in amazement. By why should they be? I wasn't afraid of the Guardians. I never turkeyed out of a rumble with the Guardians. I got heart. But I'm bleeding.

The rain was soothing somehow. It was a cold rain, but his body was hot all over, and the rain helped cool him. He had always liked rain. He could remember sitting in Laura's house one time, the rain running down the windows, and just looking out over the street, watching the people running from the rain. That was when he'd first joined the Royals.

He could remember how happy he was when the Royals had taken him. The Royals and the Guardians, two of the biggest. He was a Royal. There had been meaning to the title.

Now, in the alley, with the cold rain washing his hot body, he wondered about the meaning. If he died, he was Andy. He was not a Royal. He was simply Andy, and he was dead. And he wondered suddenly if the Guardians who had ambushed him and knifed him had ever once realized he was Andy? Had they known that he was Andy or had they simply known that he was Royal wearing a purple silk jacket? Had they stabbed him, Andy, or had they only stabbed the jacket and the title and what good was the title if you were dying?

I'm Andy, he screamed wordlessly, I'm Andy.

An old lady stopped at the other end of the alley. The garbage cans were stacked there, beating noisily in the rain. The old lady carried an umbrella with broken ribs, carried it like a queen. She stepped into the mouth of the alley, shopping bag over one arm. She lifted the lids of the garbage cans. She did not hear Andy grunt because she was a little deaf and because the rain was beating on the cans. She collected her string and her newspapers, and an old hat with a feather on it from one of the garbage cans, and a broken footstool from another of the cans. And then she replaced the lids and lifted her umbrella high and walked out of the alley mouth. She had worked quickly and soundlessly, and now she was gone.

The alley looked very long now. He could see people passing at the other end of it, and he wondered who the people were, and he wondered if he would ever get to know them, wondered who it was of the Guardians who had stabbed him, who had plunged the knife into his body.

"That's for you, Royal!" the voice had said. "That's for you, Royal!" Even in his pain, there had been some sort of pride in knowing he was a Royal. Now there was no pride at all. With the rain beginning to chill him, with the blood pouring steadily between his fingers, he knew only a sort of dizziness. He could only think: I want to be Andy.

It was not very much to ask of the world.

He watched the world passing at the other end of the alley. The world didn't know he was Andy. The world didn't know he was alive. He wanted to say, "Hey, I'm alive! Hey, look at me! I'm alive! Don't you know I'm alive? Don't you know I exist?"

He felt weak and very tired. He felt alone, and wet and feverish and chilled. He knew he was going to die now. That made him suddenly sad. He was filled with sadness that his life would be over at sixteen. He felt all at once as if he had never done anything, never seen anything, never been anywhere. There were so many things to do. He wondered why he'd never thought of them before, wondered why the rumbles and the jumps and the purple jackets had always seemed so important to him before. Now they seemed like such small things in a world he was missing, a world that was rushing past at the other end of the alley.

I don't want to die, he thought. I haven't lived yet. It seemed very important to him that he take off the purple jacket. He was very close to dying, and when they found him, he did not want them to say, "Oh, it's a Royal." With great effort, he rolled over onto his back. He felt the pain tearing at his stomach when he moved. If he never did another thing, he wanted to take off the jacket. The jacket had only one meaning now, and that was a very simple meaning.

If he had not been wearing the jacket, he wouldn't have been stabbed. The knife had not been plunged in hatred of Andy. The knife hated only the purple jacket. The jacket was as stupid meaningless thing that was robbing him of his life.

He lay struggling with the shiny wet jacket. His arms were heavy. Pain ripped fire across his body whenever he moved. But he squirmed and fought and twisted until one arm was free and then the other. He rolled away from the jacket and lay quite still, breathing heavily, listening to the sound of his breathing and the sounds of the rain and thinking: Rain is sweet, I'm Andy.

She found him in the doorway a minute past midnight. She left the dance to look for him, and when she found him, she knelt beside him and said, "Andy, it's me, Angela."

He did not answer her. She backed away from him, tears springing into her eyes, and then she ran from the alley. She did not stop running until she found a cop.

And now, standing with the cop, she looked down at him. The cop rose and said, "He's dead." All the crying was out of her now. She stood in the rain and said nothing, looking at the purple jacket that rested a foot away from his body.

The cop picked up the jacket and turned it over in his hands.

"A Royal, huh?" he said.

She looked at the cop and, very quietly, she said, "His name is Andy."

The cop slung the jacket over his arm. He took out his black pad, and he flipped it open to a blank page.

"A Royal." he said. Then he began writing.

The End

HARRISON BERGERON

by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

THE YEAR WAS 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.

Some things about living still weren't quite right, though. April for instance, still drove people crazy by not being springtime. And it was in that clammy month that the H-G men took George and Hazel Bergeron's fourteen-year-old son, Harrison, away.

It was tragic, all right, but George and Hazel couldn't think about it very hard. Hazel had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn't think about anything except in short bursts. And George, while his intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his ear. He was required by law to wear it at all times. It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains.

George and Hazel were watching television. There were tears on Hazel's cheeks, but she'd forgotten for the moment what they were about.

On the television screen were ballerinas.

A buzzer sounded in George's head. His thoughts fled in panic, like bandits from a burglar alarm.

"That was a real pretty dance, that dance they just did," said Hazel.

"Huh" said George.

"That dance—it was nice," said Hazel.

"Yup," said George. He tried to think a little about the ballerinas. They weren't really very good-no better than anybody else would have been, anyway. They were burdened with sashweights and bags of birdshot, and their faces were masked, so that no one, seeing a free and graceful gesture or a pretty face, would feel like something the cat drug in. George was toying with the vague notion that maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped. But he didn't get very far with it before another noise in his ear radio scattered his thoughts.

George winced. So did two out of the eight ballerinas.

Hazel saw him wince. Having no mental handicap herself, she had to ask George what the latest sound had been.

"Sounded like somebody hitting a milk bottle with a ball peen hammer," said George.

"I'd think it would be real interesting, hearing all the different sounds," said Hazel a little envious. "All the things they think up."

"Um," said George.

"Only, if I was Handicapper General, you know what I would do?" said Hazel. Hazel, as a matter of fact, bore a strong resemblance to the Handicapper General, a woman named Diana Moon Glampers. "If I was Diana Moon Glampers," said Hazel, "I'd have chimes on Sunday—just chimes. Kind of in honor of religion."

"I could think, if it was just chimes," said George.

Well—maybe make 'em real loud," said Hazel. "I think I'd make a good Handicapper

General." "Good as anybody else," said George.

"Who knows better then I do what normal is?" said Hazel.

"Right," said George. He began to think glimmeringly about his abnormal son who was now in jail, about Harrison, but a twenty-one-gun salute in his head stopped that.

"Boy!" said Hazel, "that was a doozy, wasn't it?"

It was such a doozy that George was white and trembling, and tears stood on the rims of his red eyes. Two of of the eight ballerinas had collapsed to the studio floor, were holding their temples.

"All of a sudden you look so tired," said Hazel. "Why don't you stretch out on the sofa, so's you can rest your handicap bag on the pillows, honeybunch." She was referring to the forty-seven pounds of birdshot in a canvas bag, which was padlocked around George's neck. "Go on and rest the bag for a little while," she said. "I don't care if you're not equal to me for a while."

George weighed the bag with his hands. "I don't mind it," he said. "I don't notice it any more. It's just a part of me."

"You been so tired lately—kind of wore out," said Hazel. "If there was just some way we could make a little hole in the bottom of the bag, and just take out a few of them lead balls. Just a few."

"Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out," said George. "I don't call that a bargain."

"If you could just take a few out when you came home from work," said Hazel. "I mean—you don't compete with anybody around here. You just set around."

"If I tried to get away with it," said George, "then other people'd get away with it—and pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"I'd hate it," said Hazel.

"There you are," said George. The minute people start cheating on laws, what do you think happens to society?"

If Hazel hadn't been able to come up with an answer to this question, George couldn't have supplied one. A siren was going off in his head.

"Reckon it'd fall all apart," said Hazel. "What would?" said George blankly.

"Society," said Hazel uncertainly. "Wasn't that what you just said? "Who knows?" said George.

The television program was suddenly interrupted for a news bulletin. It wasn't clear at first as to what the bulletin was about, since the announcer, like all announcers, had a serious speech impediment. For about half a minute, and in a state of high excitement, the announcer tried to say, "Ladies and Gentlemen."

He finally gave up, handed the bulletin to a ballerina to read.

"That's all right—" Hazel said of the announcer, "he tried. That's the big thing. He tried to do the best he could with what God gave him. He should get a nice raise for trying so hard."

"Ladies and Gentlemen," said the ballerina, reading the bulletin. She must have been extraordinarily beautiful, because the mask she wore was hideous. And it was easy to see that she was the strongest and most graceful of all the dancers, for her handicap bags were as big as those worn by two-hundred pound men.

And she had to apologize at once for her voice, which was a very unfair voice for a woman to use. Her voice was a warm, luminous, timeless melody. "Excuse me—" she said, and she began again, making her voice absolutely uncompetitive.

"Harrison Bergeron, age fourteen," she said in a grackle squawk, "has just escaped from jail, where he was held on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government. He is a genius and an athlete, is under-handicapped, and should be regarded as extremely dangerous."

A police photograph of Harrison Bergeron was flashed on the screen—upside down, then sideways, upside down again, then right side up. The picture showed the full length of Harrison against a background calibrated in feet and inches. He was exactly seven feet tall.

The rest of Harrison's appearance was Halloween and hardware. Nobody had ever born heavier handicaps. He had outgrown hindrances faster than the H-G men could think them up. Instead of a little ear radio for a mental handicap, he wore a tremendous pair of earphones, and spectacles with thick wavy lenses. The spectacles were intended to make him not only half blind, but to give him whanging headaches besides.

Scrap metal was hung all over him. Ordinarily, there was a certain symmetry, a military neatness to the handicaps issued to strong people, but Harrison looked like a walking junkyard. In the race of life, Harrison carried three hundred pounds.

And to offset his good looks, the H-G men required that he wear at all times a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random.

"If you see this boy," said the ballerina, "do not—I repeat, do not—try to reason with him." There

was the shriek of a door being torn from its hinges.

Screams and barking cries of consternation came from the television set. The photograph of Harrison Bergeron on the screen jumped again and again, as though dancing to the tune of an earthquake.

George Bergeron correctly identified the earthquake, and well he might have—for many was the time his own home had danced to the same crashing tune. "My God—" said George, "that must be Harrison!"

The realization was blasted from his mind instantly by the sound of an automobile collision in his head.

When George could open his eyes again, the photograph of Harrison was gone. A living, breathing Harrison filled the screen.

Clanking, clownish, and huge, Harrison stood—in the center of the studio. The knob of the uprooted studio door was still in his hand. Ballerinas, technicians, musicians, and announcers cowered on their knees before him, expecting to die.

"I am the Emperor!" cried Harrison. "Do you hear? I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!" He stamped his foot and the studio shook.

"Even as I stand here" he bellowed, "crippled, hobbled, sickened—I am a greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can become!"

Harrison tore the straps of his handicap harness like wet tissue paper, tore straps guaranteed to support five thousand pounds.

Harrison's scrap-iron handicaps crashed to the floor.

Harrison thrust his thumbs under the bar of the padlock that secured his head harness. The bar snapped like celery. Harrison smashed his headphones and spectacles against the wall.

He flung away his rubber-ball nose, revealed a man that would have awed Thor, the god of thunder.

"I shall now select my Empress!" he said, looking down on the cowering people. "Let the first woman who dares rise to her feet claim her mate and her throne!"

A moment passed, and then a ballerina arose, swaying like a willow.

Harrison plucked the mental handicap from her ear, snapped off her physical handicaps with marvelous delicacy. Last of all he removed her mask.

She was blindingly beautiful.

"Now—" said Harrison, taking her hand, "shall we show the people the meaning of the word dance? Music!" he commanded.

The musicians scrambled back into their chairs, and Harrison stripped them of their handicaps, too. "Play your best," he told them, "and I'll make you barons and dukes and earls."

The music began. It was normal at first—cheap, silly, false. But Harrison snatched two musicians from their chairs, waved them like batons as he sang the music as he wanted it played. He slammed them back into their chairs.

The music began again and was much improved.

Harrison and his Empress merely listened to the music for a while—listened gravely, as though synchronizing their heartbeats with it.

They shifted their weights to their toes.

Harrison placed his big hands on the girls tiny waist, letting her sense the weightlessness that would soon be hers.

And then, in an explosion of joy and grace, into the air they sprang!

Not only were the laws of the land abandoned, but the law of gravity and the laws of motion as well.

They reeled, whirled, swiveled, flounced, capered, gamboled, and spun.

They leaped like deer on the moon.

The studio ceiling was thirty feet high, but each leap brought the dancers nearer to it.

It became their obvious intention to kiss the ceiling. They kissed it.

And then, neutraling gravity with love and pure will, they remained suspended in air inches below the ceiling, and they kissed each other for a long, long time.

It was then that Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General, came into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor.

Diana Moon Glampers loaded the gun again. She aimed it at the musicians and told them they had ten seconds to get their handicaps back on.

It was then that the Bergerons' television tube burned out.

Hazel turned to comment about the blackout to George. But George had gone out into the kitchen for a can of beer.

George came back in with the beer, paused while a handicap signal shook him up. And then he sat down again. "You been crying" he said to Hazel.

"Yup," she said.

"What about?" he said.

"I forget," she said. "Something real sad on television."

"What was it?" he said.

"It's all kind of mixed up in my mind," said Hazel.

"Forget sad things," said George.

"I always do," said Hazel.

"That's my girl," said George. He winced. There was the sound of a rivetting gun in his head.

"Gee—I could tell that one was a doozy," said Hazel.

"You can say that again," said George.

"Gee—" said Hazel, "I could tell that one was a doozy."

Raymond's Run

by Toni Cade Bambara

I don't have much work to do around the house like some girls. My mother does that. And I don't have to earn my pocket money by hustling; George runs errands for the big boys and sells Christmas cards. And anything else that's got to get done, my father does. All I have to do in life is mind my brother Raymond, which is enough.

Sometimes I slip and say my little brother Raymond. But as any fool can see he's much bigger and he's older too. But a lot of people call him my little brother cause he needs looking after cause he's not quite right. And a lot of smart mouths got lots to say about that too, especially when George was minding him. But now, if anybody has anything to say to Raymond, anything to say about his big head, they have to come by me. And I don't play the dozens or believe in standing around with somebody in my face doing a lot of talking. I much rather just knock you down and take my chances even if I am a little girl with skinny arms and a squeaky voice, which is how I got the name Squeaky. And if things get too rough, I run. And as anybody can tell you, I'm the fastest thing on two feet.

There is no track meet that I don't win the first-place medal. I used to win the twenty-yard dash when I was a little kid in kindergarten. Nowadays, it's the fifty-yard dash. And tomorrow I'm subject to run the quarter-meter relay all by myself and come in first, second, and third. The big kids call me Mercury cause I'm the swiftest thing in the neighborhood. Everybody knows that—except two people who know better, my father and me. He can beat me to Amsterdam Avenue with me having a two-fire-hydrant headstart and him running with his hands in his pockets and whistling. But that's private information. Cause can you imagine some thirty-five-year-old man stuffing himself into PAL shorts to race little kids? So as far as everyone's concerned, I'm the fastest and that goes for Gretchen, too, who has put out the tale that she is going to win the first-place medal this year. Ridiculous. In the second place, she's got short legs. In the third place, she's got freckles. In the first place, no one can beat me and that's all there is to it.

I'm standing on the corner admiring the weather and about to take a stroll down Broadway so I can practice my breathing exercises, and I've got Raymond walking on the inside close to the buildings, cause he's subject to fits of fantasy and starts thinking he's a circus performer and that the curb is a tightrope strung high in the air. And sometimes after a rain he likes to step down off his tightrope right into the gutter and slosh around getting his shoes and cuffs wet. Then I get hit when I get home. Or sometimes if you don't watch him he'll dash across traffic to the island in the middle of Broadway and give the pigeons a fit. Then I have to go behind him apologizing to all the old people sitting around trying to get some sun and getting all upset with the pigeons fluttering around them, scattering their newspapers and upsetting the waxpaper lunches in their laps. So I keep Raymond on the inside of me, and he plays like he's driving a stage coach which is OK by me so long as he doesn't run me over or interrupt my breathing exercises, which I have to do on account of I'm serious about my running, and I don't care who knows it.

Now some people like to act like things come easy to them, won't let on that they practice. Not me. I'll high-prance down 34th Street like a rodeo pony to keep my knees strong even if it does get my mother uptight so that she walks ahead like she's not with me, don't know me, is all by herself on a shopping trip, and I am somebody else's crazy child. Now you take Cynthia Procter for instance. She's just the opposite. If there's a test tomorrow, she'll say something like, "Oh, I guess I'll play

handball this afternoon and watch television tonight," just to let you know she ain't thinking about the test. Or like last week when she won the spelling bee for the millionth time, "A good thing you got 'receive,' Squeaky, cause I would have got it wrong. I completely forgot about the spelling bee." And she'll clutch the lace on her blouse like it was a narrow escape. Oh, brother. But of course when I pass her house on my early morning trots around the block, she is practicing the scales on the piano over and over and over and over. Then in music class she always lets herself get bumped around so she falls accidentally on purpose onto the piano stool and is so surprised to find herself sitting there that she decides just for fun to try out the ole keys. And what do you know—Chopin's waltzes just spring out of her fingertips and she's the most surprised thing in the world. A regular prodigy. I could kill people like that. I stay up all night studying the words for the spelling bee. And you can see me any time of day practicing running. I never walk if I can trot, and shame on Raymond if he can't keep up. But of course he does, cause if he hangs back someone's liable to walk up to him and get smart, or take his allowance from him, or ask him where he got that great big pumpkin head. People are so stupid sometimes.

So I'm strolling down Broadway breathing out and breathing in on counts of seven, which is my lucky number, and here comes Gretchen and her sidekicks: Mary Louise, who used to be a friend of mine when she first moved to Harlem from Baltimore and got beat up by everybody till I took up for her on account of her mother and my mother used to sing in the same choir when they were young girls, but people ain't grateful, so now she hangs out with the new girl Gretchen and talks about me like a dog; and Rosie, who is as fat as I am skinny and has a big mouth where Raymond is concerned and is too stupid to know that there is not a big deal of difference between herself and Raymond and that she can't afford to throw stones. So they are steady coming up Broadway and I see right away that it's going to be one of those Dodge City scenes cause the street ain't that big and they're close to the buildings just as we are. First I think I'll step into the candy store and look over the new comics and let them pass. But that's chicken and I've got a reputation to consider. So then I think I'll just walk straight on through them or even over them if necessary. But as they get to me, they slow down. I'm ready to fight, cause like I said I don't feature a whole lot of chit-chat, I much prefer to just knock you down right from the jump and save everybody a lotta precious time.

"You signing up for the May Day races?" smiles Mary Louise, only it's not a smile at all. A dumb question like that doesn't deserve an answer. Besides, there's just me and Gretchen standing there really, so no use wasting my breath talking to shadows.

"I don't think you're going to win this time," says Rosie, trying to signify with her hands on her hips all salty, completely forgetting that I have whupped her behind many times for less salt than that.

"I always win cause I'm the best," I say straight at Gretchen who is, as far as I'm concerned, the only one talking in this ventrilo-quist-dummy routine. Gretchen smiles, but it's not a smile, and I'm thinking that girls never really smile at each other because they don't know how and don't want to know how and there's probably no one to teach us how, cause grown-up girls don't know either. Then they all look at Raymond who has just brought his mule team to a standstill. And they're about to see what trouble they can get into through him.

"What grade you in now, Raymond?"

“You got anything to say to my brother, you say it to me, Mary Louise Williams of Raggedy Town, Baltimore.”

“What are you, his mother?” sasses Rosie.

“That’s right, Fatso. And the next word out of anybody and I’ll be *their* mother too.” So they just stand there and Gretchen shifts from one leg to the other and so do they. Then Gretchen puts her hands on her hips and is about to say something with her freckle-face self but doesn’t. Then she walks around me looking me up and down but keeps walking up
Broadway, and her sidekicks follow her. So me and Raymond smile at each other and he says, “Gidyap” to his team and I continue with my breathing exercises, strolling down Broadway toward the ice man on 145th with not a care in the world cause I am Miss Quicksilver herself.

I take my time getting to the park on May Day because the track meet is the last thing on the program. The biggest thing on the program is the May Pole dancing, which I can do without, thank you, even if my mother thinks it’s a shame I don’t take part and act like a girl for a change. You’d think my mother’d be grateful not to have to make me a white organdy dress with a big satin sash and buy me new white baby-doll shoes that can’t be taken out of the box till the big day. You’d think she’d be glad her daughter ain’t out there prancing around a May Pole getting the new clothes all dirty and sweaty and trying to act like a fairy or a flower or whatever you’re supposed to be when you should be trying to be yourself, whatever that is, which is, as far as I am concerned, a poor black girl who really can’t afford to buy shoes and a new dress you only wear once a lifetime cause it won’t fit next year.

I was once a strawberry in a Hansel and Gretel pageant when I was in nursery school and didn’t have no better sense than to dance on tiptoe with my arms in a circle over my head doing umbrella steps and being a perfect fool just so my mother and father could come dressed up and clap. You’d think they’d know better than to encourage that kind of nonsense. I am not a strawberry. I do not dance on my toes. I run. That is what I am all about. So I always come late to the May Day program, just in time to get my number pinned on and lay in the grass till they announce the fifty-yard dash.

I put Raymond in the little swings, which is a tight squeeze this year and will be impossible next year. Then I look around for Mr. Pearson, who pins the numbers on. I’m really looking for Gretchen if you want to know the truth, but she’s not around. The park is jam-packed. Parents in hats and corsages and breast-pocket handkerchiefs peeking up.

Kids in white dresses and light-blue suits. The parkees unfolding chairs and chasing the rowdy kids from Lenox as if they had no right to be there. The big guys with their caps on backwards, leaning against the fence swirling the basketballs on the tips of their fingers, waiting for all these crazy people to clear out the park so they can play. Most of the kids in my class are carrying bass drums and glockenspiels and flutes. You’d think they’d put in a few bongos or something for real like that.

Then here comes Mr. Pearson with his clipboard and his cards and pencils and whistles and safety pins and fifty million other things he’s always dropping all over the place with his clumsy self. He sticks out in a crowd because he’s on stilts. We used to call him Jack and the Beanstalk to get him mad. But I’m the only one that can outrun him and get away, and I’m too grown for that silliness now.

“Well, Squeaky,” he says, checking my name off the list and handing me number seven and two pins. And I’m thinking he’s got no right to call me Squeaky, if I can’t call him Beanstalk.

“Hazel Elizabeth Deborah Parker,” I correct him and tell him to write it down on his board.

“Well, Hazel Elizabeth Deborah Parker, going to give someone else a break this year?” I squint at him real hard to see if he is seriously thinking I should lose the race on purpose just to give someone else a break. “Only six girls running this time,” he continues, shaking his head sadly like it’s my fault all of New York didn’t turn out in sneakers. “That new girl should give you a run for your money.” He looks around the park for Gretchen like a periscope in a submarine movie. “Wouldn’t it be a nice gesture if you were . . . to ahhh . . .”

I give him such a look he couldn’t finish putting that idea into words. Grown-ups got a lot of nerve sometimes. I pin number seven to myself and stomp away, I’m so burnt. And I go straight for the track and stretch out on the grass while the band winds up with “Oh, the Monkey Wrapped His Tail Around the Flag Pole,” which my teacher calls by some other name. The man on the loudspeaker is calling everyone over to the track and I’m on my back looking at the sky, trying to pretend I’m in the country, but I can’t, because even grass in the city feels hard as sidewalk, and there’s just no pretending you are anywhere but in a “concrete jungle” as my grandfather says.

The twenty-yard dash takes all of two minutes cause most of the little kids don’t know no better than to run off the track or run the wrong way or run smack into the fence and fall down and cry. One little kid, though, has got the good sense to run straight for the white ribbon up ahead so he wins. Then the second-graders line up for the thirty-yard dash and I don’t even bother to turn my head to watch cause Raphael Perez always wins. He wins before he even begins by psyching the runners, telling them they’re going to trip on their shoelaces and fall on their faces or lose their shorts or something, which he doesn’t really have to do since he is very fast, almost as fast as I am. After that is the forty-yard dash which I used to run when I was in first grade. Raymond is hollering from the swings cause he knows I’m about to do my thing cause the man on the loudspeaker has just announced the fifty-yard dash, although he might just as well be giving a recipe for angel food cake cause you can hardly make out what he’s sayin for the static. I get up and slip off my sweat pants and then I see Gretchen standing at the starting line, kicking her legs out like a pro. Then as I get into place I see that ole Raymond is on line on the other side of the fence, bending down with his fingers on the ground just like he knew what he was doing. I was going to yell at him but then I didn’t. It burns up your energy to holler.

Every time, just before I take off in a race, I always feel like I’m in a dream, the kind of dream you have when you’re sick with fever and feel all hot and weightless. I dream I’m flying over a sandy beach in the early morning sun, kissing the leaves of the trees as I fly by. And there’s always the smell of apples, just like in the country when I was little and used to think I was a choo-choo train, running through the fields of corn and chugging up the hill to the orchard. And all the time I’m dreaming this, I get lighter and lighter until I’m flying over the beach again, getting blown through the sky like a feather that weighs nothing at all. But once I spread my fingers in the dirt and crouch over the Get on Your Mark, the dream goes and I am solid again and am telling myself, Squeaky you must win, you must win, you are the fastest thing in the world, you can even beat your father up Amsterdam if you really try. And then I feel my weight coming back just behind my knees then down to my feet then into the earth and the pistol shot explodes in my blood and I am off and weightless again, flying past the other runners, my arms pumping up and down and the whole world is quiet except for the crunch as I zoom over the gravel in the track. I glance to my left and there is no one. To the right, a blurred Gretchen, who’s got her chin jutting out as if it would win the race all by itself. And on the other side of the fence is Raymond with his arms down to his side and the palms tucked

up behind him, running in his very own style, and it's the first time I ever saw that and I almost stop to watch my brother Raymond on his first run. But the white ribbon is bouncing toward me and I tear past it, racing into the distance till my feet with a mind of their own start digging up footfuls of dirt and brake me short. Then all the kids standing on the side pile on me, banging me on the back and slapping my head with their May Day programs, for I have won again and everybody on 151st Street can walk tall for another year.

"In first place . . ." the man on the loudspeaker is clear as a bell now. But then he pauses and the loudspeaker starts to whine. Then static. And I lean down to catch my breath and here comes Gretchen walking back, for she's overshot the finish line too, huffing and puffing with her hands on her hips taking it slow, breathing in steady time like a real pro and I sort of like her a little for the first time. "In first place . . ." and then three or four voices get all mixed up on the loudspeaker and I dig my sneaker into the grass and stare at Gretchen who's staring back, we both wondering just who did win. I can hear old Beanstalk arguing with the man on the loudspeaker and then a few others running their mouths about what the stopwatches say. Then I hear Raymond yanking at the fence to call me and I wave to shush him, but he keeps rattling the fence like a gorilla in a cage like in them gorilla movies, but then like a dancer or something he starts climbing up nice and easy but very fast. And it occurs to me, watching how smoothly he climbs hand over hand and remembering how he looked running with his arms down to his side and with the wind pulling his mouth back and his teeth showing and all, it occurred to me that Raymond would make a very fine runner. Doesn't he always keep up with me on my trots? And he surely knows how to breathe in counts of seven cause he's always doing it at the dinner table, which drives my brother George up the wall. And I'm smiling to beat the band cause if I've lost this race, or if me and Gretchen tied, or even if I've won, I can always retire as a runner and begin a whole new career as a coach with Raymond as my champion. After all, with a little more study I can beat Cynthia and her phony self at the spelling bee. And if I bugged my mother, I could get piano lessons and become a star. And I have a big rep as the baddest thing around. And I've got a roomful of ribbons and medals and awards. But what has Raymond got to call his own?

So I stand there with my new plans, laughing out loud by this time as Raymond jumps down from the fence and runs over with his teeth showing and his arms down to the side, which no one before him has quite mastered as a running style. And by the time he comes over I'm jumping up and down so glad to see him—my brother Raymond, a great runner in the family tradition. But of course everyone thinks I'm jumping up and down because the men on the loudspeaker have finally gotten themselves together and compared notes and are announcing "In first place—Miss Hazel Elizabeth Deborah Parker." (Dig that.) "In second place—Miss Gretchen P. Lewis." And I look over at Gretchen wondering what the "P" stands for. And I smile. Cause she's good, no doubt about it. Maybe she'd like to help me coach Raymond; she obviously is serious about running, as any fool can see. And she nods to congratulate me and then she smiles. And I smile. We stand there with this big smile of respect between us. It's about as real a smile as girls can do for each other, considering we don't practice real smiling every day, you know, cause maybe we too busy being flowers or fairies or strawberries instead of something honest and worthy of respect . . . you know . . . like being people.

Shame

I never learned hate at home, or shame. I had to go to school for that. I was about seven years old when I got my first big lesson. I was in love with a little girl named Helene Tucker, a light-complexioned little girl with pigtails and nice manners. She was always clean and she was smart in school. I think I went to school then mostly to look at her. I brushed my hair and even got me a little old handkerchief. It was a lady's handkerchief, but I didn't want Helene to see me wipe my nose on my hand.

The pipes were frozen again, there was no water in the house, but I washed my socks and shirt every night. I'd get a pot, and go over to Mister Ben's grocery store, and stick my pot down into his soda machine and scoop out some chopped ice. By evening the ice melted to water for washing. I got sick a lot that winter because the fire would go out at night before the clothes were dry. In the morning I'd put them on, wet or dry, because they were the only clothes I had.

Everybody's got a Helene Tucker, a symbol of everything you want. I loved her for her goodness, her cleanness, her popularity. She'd walk down my street and my brothers and sisters would yell, "Here comes Helene," and I'd rub my tennis sneakers on the back of my pants and wish my hair wasn't so nappy and the white folks' shirt fit me better. I'd run out on the street. If I knew my place and didn't come too close, she'd wink at me and say hello. That was a good feeling. Sometimes I'd follow her all the way home, and shovel the snow off her walk and try to make friends with her momma and her aunts. I'd drop money on her stoop late at night on my way back from shining shoes in the taverns. And she had a daddy, and he had a good job. He was a paperhanger.

I guess I would have gotten over Helene by summertime, but something happened in that classroom that made her face hang in front of me for the next twenty-two years. When I played the drums in high school, it was for Helene, and when I broke track records in college, it was for Helene, and when I started standing behind microphones and heard applause, I wished Helene could hear it too. It wasn't until I was twenty-nine years old and married and making money that I finally got her out of my system. Helene was sitting in that classroom when I learned to be ashamed of myself.

It was on a Thursday. I was sitting in the back of the room, in a seat with a chalk circle drawn around it. The idiot's seat, the troublemaker's seat.

The teacher thought I was stupid. Couldn't spell, couldn't read, couldn't do arithmetic. Just stupid. Teachers were never interested in finding out that you couldn't concentrate because you

were so hungry, because you hadn't had any breakfast. All you could think about was noontime; would it ever come? Maybe you could sneak into the cloakroom and steal a bite of some kid's lunch out of a coat pocket. A bite of something. Paste. You can't really make a meal of paste, or put it on bread for a sandwich, but sometimes I'd scoop a few spoonfuls out of the big paste jar in the back of the room. Pregnant people get strange tastes. I was pregnant with poverty. Pregnant with dirt and pregnant with smells that made people turn away. Pregnant with cold and pregnant with shoes that were never bought for me. Pregnant with five other people in my bed and no daddy in the next room, and pregnant with hunger. Paste doesn't taste too bad when you're hungry.

The teacher thought I was a troublemaker. All she saw from the front of the room was a little black boy who squirmed in his idiot's seat and made noises and poked the kids around him. I guess she couldn't see a kid who made noises because he wanted someone to know he was there.

It was on a Thursday, the day before the Negro payday. The eagle always flew on Friday.[1] The teacher was asking each student how much his father would give to the Community Chest. On Friday night, each kid would get the money from his father, and on Monday he would bring it to the school. I decided I was going to buy a daddy right then. I had money in my pocket from shining shoes and selling papers, and whatever Helene Tucker pledged for her daddy I was going to top it. And I'd hand the money right in.

I was shaking, scared to death. The teacher opened her book and started calling out names alphabetically: "Helene Tucker?" "My Daddy said he'd give two dollars and fifty cents." "That's very nice, Helene. Very, very nice indeed."

That made me feel pretty good. It wouldn't take too much to top that. I had almost three dollars in dimes and quarters in my pocket. I stuck my hand in my pocket and held on to the money, waiting for her to call my name. But the teacher closed her book after she called everybody else in the class.

I stood up and raised my hand. "What is it now?" "You forgot me?" She turned toward the blackboard. "I don't have time to be playing with you, Richard."

"My daddy said he'd..."

"Sit down, Richard, you're disturbing the class."

"My daddy said he'd give . . . fifteen dollars."

She turned around and looked mad. "We are collecting this money for you and your kind, Richard Gregory. If your daddy can give fifteen dollars you have no business being on relief."

"I got it right now, I got it right now, my Daddy gave it to me to turn in today, my daddy said. .."

1. "The eagle always flew on Friday" means that money was available to be spent on Fridays because Friday used to be the standard payday, and $10 bills were called 'eagles'.

"And furthermore," she said, looking right at me, her nostrils getting big and her lips getting thin and her eyes opening wide, "We know you don't have a daddy."

Helene Tucker turned around, her eyes full of tears. She felt sorry for me. Then I couldn't see her too well because I was crying, too.

"Sit down, Richard." And I always thought the teacher kind of liked me. She always picked me to wash the blackboard on Friday, after school. That was a big thrill; it made me feel important. If I didn't wash it, come Monday the school might not function right.

"Where are you going, Richard! "

I walked out of school that day, and for a long time I didn't go back very often.

There was shame there. Now there was shame everywhere. It seemed like the whole world had been inside that classroom, everyone had heard what the teacher had said, everyone had turned around and felt sorry for me.

There was shame in going to the Worthy Boys Annual Christmas Dinner for you and your kind, because everybody knew what a worthy boy was. Why couldn't they just call it the Boys Annual Dinner-why'd they have to give it a name?

There was shame in wearing the brown and orange and white plaid mackinaw' the welfare gave to three thousand boys. Why'd it have to be the same for everybody so when you walked down the street the people could see you were on relief? It was a nice warm mackinaw and it had a hood, and my momma beat me and called me a little rat when she found out I stuffed it in the bottom of a pail full of garbage way over on Cottage Street.

There was shame in running over to Mister Ben's at the end of the day and asking for his rotten peaches, there was shame in asking Mrs. Simmons for a spoonful of sugar, there was shame in running out to meet the relief truck. I hated that truck, full of food for you and your kind. I ran into the house and hid when it came. And then I started to sneak through alleys, to take the long way home so the people going into White's Eat Shop wouldn't see me.

Yeah, the whole world heard the teacher that day-we all know you don't have a Daddy.

It lasted for a while, this kind of numbness. I spent a lot of time feeling sorry for myself. And then one day I met this wino in a restaurant. I'd been out hustling all day, shining shoes, selling newspapers, and I had goo-gobs of money in my pocket. Bought me a bowl of chili for fifteen cents, and a cheeseburger for fifteen cents, and a Pepsi for five cents, and a piece of chocolate cake for ten cents. That was a good meal. I was eating when this old wino came in. I love winos because they never hurt anyone but themselves.

The old wino sat down at the counter and ordered twenty-six cents worth of food. He ate it like he really enjoyed it. When the owner, Mister Williams, asked him to pay the check, the old wino didn't lie or go through his pocket like he suddenly found a hole.

He just said: "Don't have no money."

The owner yelled: "Why in hell did you come in here and eat my food if you don't have no money? That food cost me money."

Mister Williams jumped over the counter and knocked the wino off his stool and beat him over the head with a pop bottle. Then he stepped back and watched the wino bleed. Then he kicked him. And he kicked him again.

I looked at the wino with blood all over his face, and I went over. "Leave him alone, Mister Williams. I'll pay the twenty-six cents."

The wino got up, slowly, pulling himself up to the stool, then up to the counter, holding on for a minute until his legs stopped shaking so bad. He looked at me with pure hate.

"Keep your twenty-six cents," the wino said. "You don't have to pay, not now. *I just finished paying for it.*"

He started to walk out, and as he passed me, he reached down and touched my shoulder. "Thanks, sonny, but it's too late now. Why didn't you pay it before?"

I was pretty sick about that. I waited too long to help another man avoid the shame. ✠✠✠

Thank You, Ma'am (by Langston Hughes)

She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the single tug the boy gave it from behind. But the boy's weight and the weight of the purse combined caused him to lose his balance so, instead of taking off full blast as he had hoped, the boy fell on his back on the sidewalk, and his legs flew up. the large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter. Then she reached down, picked the boy up by his shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

After that the woman said, "Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here." She still held him. But she bent down enough to permit him to stoop and pick up her purse. Then she said, "Now ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, Yes'm."

The woman said, "What did you want to do it for?"

The boy said, "I didn't aim to."

She said, "You a lie!"

By that time two or three people passed, stopped, turned to look, and some stood watching.

"If I turn you loose, will you run?" asked the woman.

"Yes'm," said the boy.

"Then I won't turn you loose," said the woman. She did not release him.

"I'm very sorry, lady, I'm sorry," whispered the boy.

"Um-hum! And your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you. Ain't you got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?"

"No'm," said the boy.

"Then it will get washed this evening," said the large woman starting up the street, dragging the frightened boy behind her.

He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, frail and willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans.

The woman said, “You ought to be my son. I would teach you right from wrong. Least I can do right now is to wash your face. Are you hungry?”

“No’m,” said the being dragged boy. “I just want you to turn me loose.”

“Was I bothering *you* when I turned that corner?” asked the woman.

“No’m.”

“But you put yourself in contact with *me*,” said the woman. “If you think that that contact is not going to last awhile, you got another thought coming. When I get through with you, sir, you are going to remember Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.”

Sweat popped out on the boy’s face and he began to struggle. Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked him around in front of her, put a half-nelson about his neck, and continued to drag him up the street. When she got to her door, she dragged the boy inside, down a hall, and into a large kitchenette-furnished room at the rear of the house. She switched on the light and left the door open. The boy could hear other roomers laughing and talking in the large house. Some of their doors were open, too, so he knew he and the woman were not alone. The woman still had him by the neck in the middle of her room.

She said, “What is your name?”

“Roger,” answered the boy.

“Then, Roger, you go to that sink and wash your face,” said the woman, whereupon she turned him loose—at last. Roger looked at the door—looked at the woman—looked at the door—*and went to the sink.*

Let the water run until it gets warm,” she said. “Here’s a clean towel.”

“You gonna take me to jail?” asked the boy, bending over the sink.

“Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere,” said the woman. “Here I am trying to get home to cook me a bite to eat and you snatch my pocketbook! Maybe, you ain’t been to your supper either, late as it be. Have you?”

“There’s nobody home at my house,” said the boy.

"Then we'll eat," said the woman, "I believe you're hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook."

"I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes," said the boy.

"Well, you didn't have to snatch *my* pocketbook to get some suede shoes," said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. "You could of asked me."

"Ma'am?"

The water dripping from his face, the boy looked at her. There was a long pause. A very long pause. After he had dried his face and not knowing what else to do dried it again, the boy turned around, wondering what next. The door was open. He could make a dash for it down the hall. He could run, run, run, run, *run!*

The woman was sitting on the day-bed. After a while she said, "I were young once and I wanted things I could not get."

There was another long pause. The boy's mouth opened. Then he frowned, but not knowing he frowned.

The woman said, "Um-hum! You thought I was going to say *but*, didn't you? You thought I was going to say, *but I didn't snatch people's pocketbooks*. Well, I wasn't going to say that." Pause. Silence. "I have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son—neither tell God, if he didn't already know. So you set down while I fix us something to eat. You might run that comb through your hair so you will look presentable."

In another corner of the room behind a screen was a gas plate and an icebox. Mrs. Jones got up and went behind the screen. The woman did not watch the boy to see if he was going to run now, nor did she watch her purse which she left behind her on the day-bed. But the boy took care to sit on the far side of the room where he thought she could easily see him out of the corner of her eye, if she wanted to. He did not trust the woman *not* to trust him. And he did not want to be mistrusted now.

"Do you need somebody to go to the store," asked the boy, "maybe to get some milk or something?"

"Don't believe I do," said the woman, "unless you just want sweet milk yourself. I was going to make cocoa out of this canned milk I got here."

"That will be fine," said the boy.

She heated some lima beans and ham she had in the icebox, made the cocoa, and set the table. The woman did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his folks, or anything else that would embarrass him. Instead, as they ate, she told him about her job in a hotel beauty-shop that stayed open late, what the work was like, and how all kinds of women came in and out, blondes, red-heads, and Spanish. Then she cut him a half of her ten-cent cake.

"Eat some more, son," she said.

When they were finished eating she got up and said, "Now, here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto *my* pocketbook *nor nobody else's*—because shoes come by devilish like that will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But I wish you would behave yourself, son, from here on in."

She led him down the hall to the front door and opened it. "Good-night! Behave yourself, boy!" she said, looking out into the street.

The boy wanted to say something else other than "Thank you, ma'am" to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but he couldn't do so as he turned at the barren stoop and looked back at the large woman in the door. He barely managed to say "Thank you" before she shut the door. And he never saw her again.

"the money" - by Junot Diaz

An essay on the one time my family apartment was broken into while we were away on vacation, and how I solved the Mystery of the Stupid Morons. Appeared in The New Yorker, June 13, 2011

All the Dominicans I knew in those days sent money home. My mother certainly did. She didn't have a regular job outside of caring for us five kids so she scrimped the loot together from whatever came her way. My father was always losing his forklift job so it wasn't like she had a steady flow ever. But my mother would rather have died than not send money back home to my grandparents in Santo Domingo. They were alone down there and those remittance, beyond material support, were a way, I suspect, for *Mami* to negotiate the absence, the distance caused by our diaspora. Hard times or not she made it happen. She chipped dollars off from the cash *Papi* gave her for our daily expenses, forced our already broke family to live even broker. In those times when nobody gave a damn about nutrition we alone among our friends never had juice, soda, snacks in our apartment. Not ever. And you can forget about eating at McDonald's or having clothes with real labels. The family lived tight and that was how she built the nut that she sent home every six months or so to the grandparents

We're not talking about a huge amount either. Two, maybe three hundred dollars. But in Santo Domingo of those years, in the neighborhood in which my *abuelos* lived, that 300 smackers was the difference between life with meat and life without, between electricity and stone age. All of us kids knew where that money was hidden too—our apartment wasn't huge—but we all also knew that to touch it would have meant a violence approaching death. I, who could take the change out of my mother's purse without even thinking, couldn't have brought myself to even look at that forbidden stash.

So what happened? Exactly what you would think. The summer I was 12 my family went away on a 'vacation'—one of my father's half-baked get-to-know-our-country-better sleep-in-the-van extravaganzas—and when we returned to Jersey, exhausted, battered, we found that our front door unlocked. Stuff was knocked over, including the empty Presidente can my mother considered a decoration. My parents' room which was where the thieves had concentrated their search looked like it had been tornado tossed. The thieves had kept it simple; they'd snatched a portable radio, some of my Dungeon and Dragon hardcovers and of course: the remittances my mother had kept hidden back in a drawer.

It's not like the robbery came as some huge surprise. In our neighborhood cars and apartments were always getting jacked and the kid stupid enough to leave a bike unattended for more than .1 seconds was the kid who was never going to see that bike again. There was no respect. Everybody got hit; no matter who you were eventually it was your turn.

And that summer it was ours.

Still we took the burglary pretty hard. When you're a recent immigrant and you've put up with a lot of bullshit because of it, it's easy to feel targeted. Like it wasn't just a couple of assholes that had it in for you but the whole neighborhood—hell, maybe the whole country.

I felt that for certain and shame too, wondered if it was something we'd done, but I was also pissed. I was at the stage in my nerdery when I thought Dungeons and Dragons was gong to be my life so the loss of those books was akin to having my kidney nicked while I slept.

No one took the robbery as hard as my mom, though. My father for his part shrugged it off, wasn't his money or his parents after all; went right back to running the streets but my mother stayed angry in a Hulkish way none of us seen before. You would have thought the thieves had run off with 10 million dollars, how she was carrying on. It was bad. She cursed the neighborhood, she cursed the country, she cursed my father and of course she cursed us kids, swore that the only reason that the robbery happened was because we had run our gums to our idiot friends and they had done it. Something we all denied of course. And at least once a day usually while we were eating she'd say: I guess your *abuelos* are going to starve now.

Just in case we kids didn't feel impotent and responsible enough.

Anyway this is where the tale should end, right? Wasn't as if there was going to be any CSI style investigation or anything. Should have been bye-bye money, bye-bye Dungeon Masters Guide. Except that a couple of days later I was moaning about the robbery to these guys I was hanging with at that time and they were cursing sympathetically and out of nowhere it struck me. You know when you get one of those moments of almost mental clarity? When the nictitating membrane obscuring the world suddenly lifts? That's what happened. For no reason whatsoever I realized that these two dopes that I called my friends had done it. They'd broken into the apartment while we were away and taken our shit. I couldn't have been any more sure if you'd shown me a video of them doing it. They were shaking their heads, mouthing all the right words but I could see the way they looked at each other, those Raskalnikov glances. I *knew*.

Now it wasn't like I could publicly denounce these dolts or go to the police. That would have been about as useless as crying. Here's what I did: I asked the main dope to let me use his bathroom (we were in front of his apartment), and while I pretended to piss, I unlatched the window and then we all headed down to the community pool as usual. But while they dove in I pretended to forget something back home. Ran back to the dope's apartment, slid open the bathroom window and in broad daylight wriggled my skinny ass into his apartment; his mom was of course at work. Where the hell did I get these ideas? I have not a clue. I guess I was reading way too much Encyclopedia Brown and the Three Investigators in those days. What can I tell you—that's just the kind of moron I was.

Because if mine had been the normal neighborhood this is when the cops would have been called and my ass would have been caught burglarizing—oh the irony—imagine me trying to explain that one to my mother. But no matter: mine wasn't a normal neighborhood and so no one called anybody. The dolt's family had been in the US all their lives and they had a ton of stuff in their apartment, a TV in every room but I didn't have to do a great amount of searching. I popped up the dolt's mattress and underneath I found my AD&D books and also most of my mother's money. The dolt had thoughtfully kept it in the same envelope. Walked out the front door and on the run back to my apartment I kept waiting for the SWAT team to zoom up but it never happened.

And that was how I solved the Case of the Stupid Morons. My one and only case.

The next day at the pool the dolt announced that someone had broken into his apartment and stolen all of his savings. This place is full of thieves, he complained bitterly and I was like: No kidding.

Took me two days to return the money to my mother. Truth was I was seriously considering keeping it. I'd never had that much money hand and who in those days didn't want a Colecovision? But in the end the guilt got to me and I gave it to her and told her what had happened. I guess I was expecting my mother to run around in joy, to crown me her favorite son, to at least cook me my favorite meal. Nada. She just looked at the money and then at me and went back to her bedroom and put it back in its place. I'd wanted a party or at least to see her happy but there was nothing. Just 200 and some odd dollars and fifteen hundred or so miles — that's all there was.

The Story of an Hour
by Kate Chopin

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention make the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.