The Bluest Eye

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison is an African-American writer and professor. Growing up in Ohio, she developed a love for literature and storytelling. She studied English at Howard University and Cornell University, before teaching English at various universities and working as an editor. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970. She continued to write and gradually garnered national attention before publishing *Beloved* in 1987. *Beloved* was hugely successful, winning the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and is regularly included in the discussion of the best novel written after World War II. In 1993, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her writings often focus on the experiences of black women in the United States. She is currently a professor at Princeton University.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Bluest Eye was written during the height of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, and although the narrative takes place before the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, many of the novels themes explore the issues blacks were fighting for during the movement. During the Civil Rights movement, another movement emerged, called the Black is Beautiful Movement. The Black is Beautiful Movement, aimed to eliminate the idea that black people's natural features, such as skin color, facial features, and hair are inherently ugly. The movement also encouraged black people to embrace their natural features, and refrain from straightening their hair or attempting to lighten of bleach their skin. The movement was an effort to counteract the then prominent idea that white people were more beautiful and desirable than black people.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Morrison's work joins the African-American literary tradition, which strives to depict the African-American experience of living in the United States. With *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison set out to create a distinctively black literature, what she calls a "race-specific yet race-free prose." Her novel joins an abundance of texts that center on African-American experience in the decades after the Civil War, most notably, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neal Hurston, *Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison, *Native Son*, by Richard Wright. Morrison's prose is infused with black vernacular, and black musical traditions such as the spirituals, gospel, jazz, and the blues. Her novel also joins the modernist tradition established by Faulkner and Woolf, utilizing techniques of stream-of-consciousness, multiple perspectives, and deliberate fragmentation.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Bluest Eye*
- **When Written:** 1962-1965
- **Where Written:** Syracuse, New York
- **When Published:** 1970
- **Literary Period:** Modernist
- **Genre:** Coming of age, tragedy, African-American literature
- **Setting:** Loraine, Ohio, in the years following the great depression, 1940-1941.
- **Climax:** Pecola's rape by her father Cholly
- **Antagonist:** Cholly Breedlove, The White Standard of Beauty, and Racism
- **Point of View:** First person passages narrated by Claudia MacTeer, third person omniscient.

EXTRA CREDIT

Controversy. Morrison's novel has experienced an abundance of controversy because of the novel's strong language and sexually explicit content. The American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom lists *The Bluest Eye* as no. 12 on its list of the top 100 banned/challenged books from 2000 to 2007.

Inspiration. *The Bluest Eye* was inspired by a real life interaction Toni Morrison had with a girl who wanted blue eyes. Her reaction to the girl, which was anger, stayed with her, and later she began to wonder what leads a young girl to desire such a radical transformation. These thoughts led to the writing of *The Bluest Eye*.

PLOT SUMMARY

Nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer and her ten-year-old sister, Frieda MacTeer, live in an old house in Loraine, Ohio. It is 1941, near the end of the Great Depression, and their family struggles to make ends meet. Although there is a tremendous sense of love in their home, their mother, Mrs. MacTeer, is strict and punishes them often, but out of a sense of concern and love for her children. Their father works hard to keep the family afloat. To help financially, the MacTeer's take in a boarder named Henry Washington, who the girls call Mr. Henry. They later take in a young girl named Pecola Breedlove because her father, Cholly Breedlove, burned her family's house down and ended up in jail. Claudia and Frieda like Pecola, but feel sorry

for her. Pecola and Frieda love Shirley Temple because of her beauty, which stems from her white features, but Claudia disagrees with them.

Eventually, Pecola moves back into the storefront apartment where her family lives, and her life continues to be hard. Her father is an abusive alcoholic, and her mother is neglectful and self-righteous. Her parents fight on a regular basis, and these altercations lead to physical violence. Pecola's brother, Samuel, copes with the violence by running away, but Pecola, being a young black girl, is unable to escape. She believes she is fated to live her sad life because she is ugly, which is confirmed by the way she is treated in the community. She prays for **blue eyes** because they will make her beautiful and allow her to see the world differently.

The reader learns that Pecola's parents have both had tragic lives, which has led to their dysfunction as adults. Her father, Cholly Breedlove, was abandoned as a baby and later turned away by his father after searching him out. During Cholly's first sexual experience, two white men stumble upon him and the girl he was with and force him to continue the sexual act as they watch. This humiliating incident leads Cholly to develop a hatred for women. He lives a dangerously free life, and feels tied down after getting married. Pecola's mother, Mrs. Breedlove, has a lame foot and has always felt isolated and ugly. As a young woman, she loses herself in movies. The beautiful white actresses exacerbate her belief that she is ugly. After having children, she takes on the role of a martyr, believing her relationship with Cholly is a cross she must bear as a good Christian woman. She works for a white family, and spending time in their home makes her despise her own.

One day during the spring of 1941, Cholly returns home drunk and finds Pecola washing dishes. He experiences a fury of emotions as he watches her. At first, he feels tenderness and hatred fueled by guilt. He knows he is unable to care for her, and hates her for loving him. He rapes Pecola, and leaves her on the kitchen floor. Afterward, Mrs. Breedlove beats Pecola when she learns of the rape. In an act of desperation, Pecola visits Soaphead Church, a local charlatan who claims he can work miracles, and asks for blue eyes. Soaphead Church tricks Pecola into poisoning a dog he has long wanted to kill, stating that if the dog acts funny it is a sign she will receive her wish.

When summer arrives, Claudia and Frieda begin selling **marigold** seeds to save for a new bike. As they make their way around the neighborhood, they learn that Pecola has been impregnated by her father. Unlike the rest of the community, the girls want the baby to live. They sacrifice the money they have made, burying it by Pecola's house, and plant the remaining marigold seeds in their backyard. They believe that if the marigold seeds grow, their prayers have been answered and the baby will live. In the end, however, the seeds do not grow and Pecola's baby dies. Afterward, Pecola goes mad, and in in her psychosis, believes she has received blue eyes. The community disowns her, and from then on she lives isolated in her own world.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Pecola Breedlove – The novel's protagonist, Pecola is an eleven-year-old black girl from an abusive home. She believes she is ugly and suffers the cruelty of her parents, classmates, and other individuals in the community. She desires **blue eyes**, believing that they will make her beautiful—based on her unquestioning belief regarding whiteness as the sole standard of beauty—and allow her to transcend her horrible situation.

Claudia MacTeer – The narrator of parts of the novel, Claudia is a strong-willed and passionate nine-year-old black girl. Still young, Claudia has not experienced overt racism and violence to the extent many of the novel's other characters have. Still largely undamaged, she is compassionate toward Pecola, and rebels against the black community's worship of white beauty.

Frieda MacTeer – Claudia's older sister, Frieda is ten-years-old and possesses the same independence and resilience as Claudia. Frieda loves Shirley Temple and other white actresses, sharing the community's belief that whiteness is the paragon of beauty and virtue. Frieda possesses a deeper, although still limited, view of womanhood and adulthood, which Claudia envies.

Cholly Breedlove – Pecola's father, Cholly is a violent and severely damaged man. From a young age Cholly has been free—his mother left him on a trash heap as an infant, and his caretaker dies when he is an adolescent—but his freedom is both isolating and dangerous, allowing him to commit heinous acts without remorse. Early sexual failures and racial violence have also contributed to Cholly's vicious nature, and although Cholly is capable of love, he takes out his anger and frustration on the women in his life. He ultimately rapes Pecola, his own daughter, and then runs away.

Pauline Breedlove —Pecola's mother, also known as Polly and Mrs. Breedlove. Pauline has a disabled foot. She believes she is ugly, and has always blamed her foot for her ugliness and the neglect she experiences as a child. When she later loses a front tooth, her self-perceived ugliness intensifies. She views herself as a martyr because she stays with Cholly, who is verbally and physically abusive. Pauline constructs her identity based on the movies she watches, her devotion to Christianity, and her role as breadwinner of the family. She beats Pecola when she learns of Cholly's rape of her.

Henry Washington – Known by the Macteer girls as Mr. Henry, Henry, he is a boarder at the MacTeer residence. He has a reputation as a hard working, quiet man. He was never married, but has a lascivious side. He is friendly with the MacTeer girls,

but this affability covers an underlying and perverted aspect of his personality, which focuses on young girls.

Samuel Breedlove – Pecola's fourteen-year-old brother, Samuel suffers the same abuse as Pecola at the hands of their parents. Samuel, in contrast to his sister, is not afraid to get involved in his parents' arguments and even uses physical force. He is known to run away from home, which he has done twenty-seven times by the age of fourteen.

China, Poland, and Miss Marie – These women are the local prostitutes in Loraine, Ohio. The community knows Miss Marie as the Maginot Line. The women live together in an apartment above the Breedloves. Miss Marie is overweight and kind, China is skinny and sarcastic, and Poland is taciturn. The prostitutes tease each other affectionately and treat Pecola with kindness, while the rest of the community treats her cruelly.

Maureen Peal – A "high yellow dream child", as Claudia calls her, Maureen is a mulatto girl from a wealthy family. She moves to Loraine in the winter, interrupting the tedium of the long winter months. She wears nice clothing and brings large, healthy lunches to school. She is treated with special kindness and respect by her peers, and feels she is superior to others. She is capable of both kindness and cruelty.

Geraldine –A light skinned black woman from the south, Geraldine considers herself and her family superior to other black families. She keeps her house immaculately clean and is obsessed with the physical appearance of her home and family. As a mother and wife she is cold, and feels true affection only for her cat.

Louis Junior – Geraldine's son, known as Junior, is an arrogant and entitled young boy. He feels ownership of the school playground across the street from his house, and forces other children to play with him. He is lonely, and his mother's coldness has caused Junior to become sadistic and cruel, especially toward her cat.

Soaphead Church – A light skinned West Indian man, Soaphead Church is a self-proclaimed misanthrope. After failing as a preacher, he deems himself a "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams", and provides counsel to community members. He detests the human body, believing the human body is dirty, and only desires to touch the bodies of children, which he considers clean.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. MacTeer – Claudia and Frieda's mother, Mrs. MacTeer is a stern but loving mother. She has a penchant for singing blues songs, gossiping with her friends, and fussing about her house and children.

Mr. MacTeer – Claudia and Frieda's father, Mr. MacTeer works hard to keep the house warm in cold weather, and ensure his family is clothed and fed. He is fiercely protective of his family, and does not hesitate to use force when someone threatens them.

Rosemary Villanucci – Claudia and Frieda's next-door neighbor, Rosemary is white and comes from a family with more wealth than the MacTeers. Rosemary antagonizes the MacTeer girls, and tries to get them in trouble, sometimes provoking them to beat her up in the process.

Aunt Jimmy – Cholly's great aunt who raises him after his mother abandons him, but who dies when he is still young.

Samson Fuller – Cholly's father, who left him as a baby and refuses to have a relationship with him.

Blue Jack – A father figure to Cholly who works as a drayman.

M'Dear – An elderly medicine woman working in the community where Cholly grows up, she diagnoses Aunt Jimmy while she is sick.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

BEAUTY VS. UGLINESS

The black characters of the *The Bluest Eye* have been taught to believe that whiteness is the paragon of beauty. The characters are constantly subjected to images of whiteness offered through movies, books, candy, magazines, toys, and advertisements. Early in the novel, Pecola and Frieda gush over Shirley Temple's beauty, and later, Mrs. Breedlove spends her days at the movies admiring the white actresses, wishing she could access their world. The association between beauty and whiteness pushes the idea of beauty beyond the body's exterior, making it a signifier of one's value and worth. Many characters in the novel believe that their beauty (or ugliness) defines their value (or lack of value) in society, community, and family.

Characters establish their sense of self-worth based on these ideas of beauty. In turn, beauty and ugliness become internalized conditions, which have devastating effects on the lives of the novel's characters. The narrator suggests that The Breedloves are fixed in poverty because they believe they are ugly, and Pecola believes she deserves the abuse and neglect she experiences at home based on her self-perceived ugliness.

Contrary to the incapacitating effect of internalized ugliness, beauty endows certain characters with power. The presence of Maureen Peal's beauty, for example, has the power to stop to the violence Pecola experiences at the hands of the boys at

school. The power that comes along with beauty leads Pecola to believe that possessing blue eyes, the quintessential signifier of whiteness and beauty, would allow her to transcend the misery of her situation. As her life becomes more and more brutal, her obsession with blue eyes leads her to madness—and in the isolation of that madness she comes to believe that she does in fact have blue eyes. In the end, the novel suggests that beauty and ugliness in and of themselves are not destructive or dangerous. Instead, it is the internalization of the idea of what makes beauty that holds immense destructive power.

WOMEN AND FEMININITY

At its core, *The Bluest Eye* is a story about the oppression of women. The novel's women not only suffer the horrors of racial oppression, but also the tyranny and violation brought upon them by the men in their lives. The novel depicts several phases of a woman's development into womanhood. Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia, the novel's youngest female characters, possess a limited and idealistic view of what it means to be a woman, to have sex, and to be loved by a man. Mrs. Breedlove's and Geraldine's narratives depict this innocent view being shattered as they enter into the harsh realities of marriage and the oppression they experience in their homes.

Although the women of *The Bluest Eye* experience oppression from then men in their lives, they are not completely powerless. They exercise authority over their children through physical force and verbal assault, and likewise, over other women through gossip and slander. In the same way women are oppressed by men, women turn toward those who are vulnerable and weak, directing their own forms of oppression outward. The prostitutes—China, Poland, and Miss Marie—offer the only exception to the rule of male oppression over women. They gain power over men through exploiting their femininity and sexuality. Exploiting themselves in this way, however, comes at the price of their self-respect and the respect of the women around them. In many ways, the prostitutes, through their drinking, aggression, and masculine mannerisms, resemble the men they have come to hate.

The theme of women and femininity, and male oppression over women in *The Bluest Eye*, reaches its brutal climax during Cholly's rape of his own daughter, Pecola. This scene, which details the ultimate form of violence and oppression against women, is narrated completely through Cholly's perspective. The lack of Pecola's perspective during the rape scene demonstrates the silencing effect of male oppression over women.

RACE AND RACISM

Race and racism are complicated issues in *The Bluest Eye*. Unlike typical portrayals of racism, involving white hatred against blacks, *The Bluest Eye* primarily explores the issue of racism occurring between people of color. There are few white characters in Morrison's novel, and no major white characters, yet racism remains at the center of the text. Because the novel involves mostly black characters, "whiteness" exists on a spectrum. Race is not only defined by the color of one's skin, the shape of one's features, or the texture of one's hair, but also by one's place of origin, socioeconomic class, and educational background. "Whiteness" is associated with virtue, cleanliness, and value, while being black is associated with immorality, dirtiness, and worthlessness.

These ideas of race, having to do with cleanliness, virtue, and value, become internalized to varying degrees by different characters. Internalizing these ideas of race ultimately leads to racial self-hatred among the characters of *The Bluest Eye*, which creates various forms of dysfunction in the characters' lives. Mrs. Macteer, for example, is unusually harsh with Claudia when she gets sick, because sickness signifies uncleanliness, which is related to being black. Likewise, Soaphead Church, who can't stand the dirtiness he associates with black women, directs his sexual desires toward children.

The novel's characters use the other black individuals as reference points against which they judge their own "whiteness" and sense of self-worth. Distinctions are drawn based on the shade of one's skin, the hue of one's eyes, and the texture of one's hair, but when these markers fall short in defining one's race, characters opt for socioeconomic, educational, religious, regional, and hereditary differences to define their "whiteness". Geraldine attempts to separate herself and her family from appearing black by straightening her hair, using lotion on Junior's skin to keep it from becoming ashen, and keeping her home immaculately clean. Likewise, Soaphead Church uses his white heritage, place of origin, and educational background to define his "whiteness".

Characters lacking any marker of "Whiteness" suffer the most. The theme of race, and the destructive force of racial self-hatred reach a climax during Pecola's rape. This moment offers the literal and metaphorical pinnacle of racial self-hatred. After the rape, Pecola must bear the metaphorical internalization of Cholly's racial self-hatred through the trauma she carries forward, and literally, as she carries her father's baby.

HOME AND FAMILY

Home in *The Bluest Eye* represents more than the physical structure where a family lives. In Morrison's novel, home is an idea that defines the characters' sense of self and self-worth, and likewise, informs the way they are perceived by those around them. The homes depicted in *The Bluest Eye* are set against an ideal image of home and family, presented in the novel's opening section

written in the style of a Dick and Jane primer. This ideal serves to contrast the non-traditional homes and family compositions in which the novel's black families live.

Because the idea of home is fundamental in the way black families are perceived, owning and caring for a house becomes the primary focus of most black families. Already disadvantaged because of the color of their skin, home becomes a means through which black families may establish and sustain a sense of value. Several homes are depicted in the novel, offering the degrees to which idea of home defines an individual's or family's sense of worth. The Breedloves live in an abandoned storefront and have the lowest sense of self-worth. To the contrary, The Macteers live in an old house, but it is theirs and Mrs. Macteer takes great pride in it, and Geraldine lives in a beautiful house, which allows her to feel superior to other black families.

Claudia draws a sharp distinction between being without a home and being "outdoors". Most black families in the novel don't own homes, but still possess a sense of home and family. Being "outdoors", to the contrary, signifies the end of home and family, a place from which there is no return. Cholly's rape of Pecola represents the complete absence of home and family. In raping his own daughter, Cholly commits the ultimate violation of home and family. To the contrary, possessing a sense of home and family can serve as a redemptive force in one's life. Because of their home and family, Claudia and Frieda are capable of having a different perspective than characters lacking home and family. In the end, Claudia's untarnished perspective allows Morrison's narrative to unfold for the reader.

SEX AND SEXUALITY

In *The Bluest Eye*, sex is associated with violence, humiliation, and immorality. Instead of sex being an enjoyable act between two people, sex, like race and beauty standards, works as a form of oppression. For both men and women, sexual initiation has devastating effects on an individual's life and sense of self. The scenes of sexual initiation are particularly violent and humiliating, leaving a lasting effect on the novel's characters.

Cholly's first sexual experience is paired with humiliation and hatred, as the white men force him to rape Darlene. Frieda's first sexual experience is forced upon her by Mr. Henry, and causes her to believe she has been ruined. And Pecola's sexual initiation happens through rape.

Men in the story use sex as a means to oppress the women in their lives. Their sexual desires are distorted by their past sexual failures and their ideas concerning the value of women. Cholly's first sexual experience leads to his hatred of women, hatred of his own race, and his feeling of being unlovable. The combination of these things leads to the rape of his daughter. Soaphead Church's failed marriage and hatred of women leads to the direction of his repressed sexual desire toward children.

For the younger characters in *The Bluest Eye*, sex becomes the defining element of their passage into womanhood. The adolescent girls in the story, however, lack a true understanding of the perilous nature of sex. They hold idealistic views of what sex means, associating sex with love and a sense of self worth as a woman.

As an adolescent, Mrs. Breedlove fantasizes about a man coming into her life and offering redemption from the rejection she receives from her family. Geraldine represents another kind of experience. Her sense of worth as a woman still comes through her relationship with her husband. The husbands of women like Geraldine marry them because they cook, clean, and take care of the house. Although sex for her is not overtly violent, she is unable to enjoy sex because she views it as a burden she must bear for her husband.

There are examples of women who escape the violence and oppression of sex. This evasion of sexual oppression, however, comes only through passing the point of being sexually desirable, or through exploiting one's sexuality as a means to gain power over men. M'Dear and other elderly women in the community experience freedom because they are no longer desired as sexual objects. These women, however, are bitter, tired, and accept the presence of pain. The Prostitutes exploit their own sexuality to gain power over men, but this method of gaining power leads to self hatred and hatred of the opposite sex. Sex stands as the primary form of oppression in the novel. Even those who escape overt sexual violence bear the consequences of oppression through sex. The climax of the story offers the primary example of this form of oppression. Pecola's rape leads to her ultimate demise. Through this experience, Pecola embodies the devastating effect of sexual violence, and the oppressive force of sex in these women's lives.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

BLUE EYES

To the characters of *The Bluest Eye*, **Blue eyes** stand as the definitive symbol of whiteness and beauty. Characters who possess whiteness and beauty are privileged, empowered, and secure. This fact leads to Pecola's desires for blue eyes, as she believes blue eyes would change the way others see her, allowing her to transcend her horrible situation at home and in the community. Likewise, she thinks that blue eyes would give her the ability to perceive what she sees in a different way. Through the course of the novel, however, the symbolic nature of blue eyes changes. Pecola's attainment of

blue eyes comes at the expense of her sanity, and only causes the community to "see" her in a more damaging way. In this sense, the "bluest" eye could also take on the association of blue with sadness and symbolize Pecola's sadness, defining her as the saddest character in the novel, or in a larger sense, the sad realities of racial self-hatred stemming from obsession with white beauty.

MARIGOLDS

Marigolds symbolize life, birth, and the natural order in *The Bluest Eye*. Claudia and Frieda plant marigolds, believing that if the marigolds bloom, Pecola's baby will be born safely. Symbolically, the marigolds represent the continued wellbeing of nature's order, and the possibility of renewal and birth. But the flowers never bloom, and Pecola's baby dies, suggesting that the natural order his been interrupted by the incestuous nature of her pregnancy. Claudia also states that marigolds did not grow anywhere in the nation because the earth was hostile to certain kinds of flowers. Metaphorically, the flowers represent the black population, who are unjustly denied the opportunity to live freely. Racism, therefore, also stands as an interruption in the natural order.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Bluest Eye* published in 2007.

Prologue Section 2 Quotes

"Quiet as it's kept, there were no **marigolds** in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow. A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that didn't sprout; nobody's did...It had never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds into his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker), Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3-4

Explanation and Analysis

The opening paragraph of the novel reveals much about the narrative to come. The first phrase, "quiet as it's kept," signals that the story is set and narrated from within a certain community, and suggests that the coming events are not openly discussed within that community for the sake of maintaining respectability. This hints at the pervasive desire among the characters in the novel to disassociate themselves with behaviors they deem degraded and sinful, behaviors that are often linked (in the novel's American setting) to blackness.

Throughout this passage, there is a tense juxtaposition between the childish naïveté of Claudia, the narrator, and the disturbing mention of rape, incest, and child pregnancy. Claudia at first presents her belief that Pecola's baby caused the marigolds not to grow as unfounded, a matter of childlike "innocence and faith." However, she then suggests that there is a parallel between the marigolds and the baby when she compares Pecola's body to the "unyielding" black dirt where the seeds were planted. This comparison foreshadows Morrison's exploration of the association of blackness, and particularly Pecola's blackness, with undesirability and ugliness.

The phrases "our own little plot of black dirt" and "his own plot of black dirt" introduce the importance of the home and ownership. While on one level they evoke a pleasant suburban scene reminiscent of the *Dick and Jane* references threaded throughout the narrative, they also highlight the fact that ownership can have a negative side, particularly in the case of men feeling ownership of women.

"Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership. The firm possession of a yard, a porch, a grape arbor. Propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their nests.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia has explained that Pecola's father Cholly burned their house down, thereby putting the family "outdoors"––meaning he made them homeless. Claudia reflects on the terror and shame associated with being outdoors, and adds that this inspires an obsession with home ownership. Here, Morrison shows how African

American communities are deeply affected by fear and aversion to social exclusion and destitution. Although there might not be anything inherently wrong with the desire for home ownership, Claudia's statement that "propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their nests" suggests a disproportionate fixation with property. This is, of course, the result of centuries of racism, in which American blacks have been deprived of ownership and property (among many other things), but the present obsession Morrison describes comes perhaps at the expense of other, equally important matters.

> Cholly Breedlove, then, a renting black, having put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker), Cholly Breedlove

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Having explained the belief that being "outdoors" is the worst thing that could happen to a person, Claudia describes the community's denunciation of Cholly for putting his family in this position. In the eyes of the community, Cholly is reduced to the status of an animal, and, significantly, is called "a ratty nigger." The use of this racial slur shows that the community in the novel associates shameful behavior with blackness, or at least a particular version of blackness from which it strives to distinguish itself. Indeed, one of the main themes of *The Bluest Eye* is the way internalized racism leads people to judge others extra harshly, rather than empathizing with them due to their shared identity and experiences.

> When I learned how repulsive this disinterested violence was, that it was repulsive because it was disinterested, my shame floundered about for refuge. The best hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love. It was a small step to Shirley Temple.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia has described her initial resentment of white baby dolls, admitting that she harmed and dismembered a white doll she was given, and adding that she felt the impulse to do the same to little white girls in real life. However, the realization that real girls would visibly and audibly react to this pain makes her feel ashamed of her violent urges, and in response she attempts to force herself to love white girls, saying this "was a small step to Shirley Temple" (whom Frieda and Pecola love).

Here Claudia displays remarkable emotional sophistication and maturity for someone who is only nine years old. This passage shows that, as a young black girl, Claudia must navigate extremely challenging social dynamics, leading her to develop a complex and ambivalent relationship to white people, culture, and power. By forcing herself into feelings of love (even if they are fraudulent), Claudia also embodies an oppositional reaction to other characters in the novel––particularly black men––who react to the impact of racism by becoming increasingly violent, taking out their anger on the black women around them.

> "How do you do that? I mean how do you get someone to love you?"

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Pecola has gotten her period for the first time, and Frieda has explained to her and Claudia that Pecola can now have a baby if somebody loves her. In response, Pecola asks how you get someone to love you, but at this point Frieda is asleep so only Claudia hears, and she does not know how to answer. This is a highly emotive moment in the novel, with several layers of meaning. On the surface, this conversation is an example of the girls' innocence, revealing their childish naïveté about sex, relationships, and pregnancy. However, Morrison discloses the fact that Pecola becomes pregnant by incestuous rape in the second sentence of the novel, and thus we already know that this state of innocence will be tragically and violently cut short.

Because she doesn't seem to know exactly what sex is yet, during this conversation Frieda uses "love" as a euphemism for sex. Pecola's response reveals not only her lack of understanding about sex but also the lack of *any*reallove in her life. Indeed, Pecola's whole existence centers around the fact that no one loves her because she is considered ugly. In desperation, she comes to believe that having blue eyes will make her beautiful and thus loveable; however, the result of this desire is that she goes insane. The further tragic irony of her question is, of course, that she *does* become pregnant by someone who should love her (though not in a sexual sense), but who instead violently resents her.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The Breedloves lived there, nestled together in the storefront. Festering together in the debris of a realtor's whim. They slipped in and out of the box of peeling grey, making no stir in the neighborhood, no sound in the labor force, and no wave in the mayor's office. Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality—collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there.

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Samuel Breedlove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Having introduced the abandoned storefront where the Breedloves live, the unnamed narrator goes on to describe the family themselves. The image the narrator builds is of people who are trapped, dirty, broken, invisible, and in some ways barely human. The word "festering" in particular points to a sense of ugliness and hopelessness, and the phrase "each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness" suggests that the Breedlove's dilapidated residence is closer to a prison than a family home. By invoking animality and imprisonment, the narrator connects the Breedloves' misfortune with many negative stereotypes about African American life. Indeed, although the identity of the narrator remains unknown, the observations here seem to reflect the wider community's impression of the Breedloves and their ghost-like presence in the neighborhood.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ [The Breedloves] lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed because they believed they were ugly.

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Samuel Breedlove

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that the Breedloves do not live in the storefront as a temporary measure while they transition to more appropriate housing—they seem to be there permanently. Although the Breedloves are forced to live there because they are poor and black, the reason they do not try to leave is because they "believed they were ugly." Here the narrator draws a clear contrast between social forces outside of the control of any one individual and the psychic condition produced by these forces that in turn exacerbates their effects. While it would be incorrect to say that the narrator *blames*the Breedloves for their situation, it is clear that in accepting society's negative view of themselves, the Breedloves have forsaken all hope for a better future.

This passage is important because it introduces the notion that ideas about beauty and ugliness have a major impact on the way the world works. Note that the narrator does not say that the Breedloves believed they were wicked or inferior; rather, they simply believe that they are ugly. This is crucial, as throughout the novel Morrison shows that the concept of beauty––and specifically the association of whiteness with beauty and blackness with ugliness––is a highly insidious and effective way of making black people hate themselves and accept their own oppression at the hands of whites.

❝ You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their own conviction.

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Samuel Breedlove

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has described the Breedloves' facial features, which do not sound particularly strange or grotesque but actually fairly ordinary ("they had high cheekbones, and their eyes turned forward"). The narrator explains that it is not the Breedloves' features themselves that are particularly ugly, but that the "source" of their ugliness is their *belief* that they are ugly. This emphasizes the earlier point that the Breedloves remain stuck in dire circumstances because they are convinced that this is what they deserve. Note that Morrison does not imply that believing in your own beauty is a simple or easy choice; rather, over the course of the novel she implies that it is might be easier for a black girl like Pecola to go mad (as Pecola does) than to contradict the stereotypes of a racist society and convince herself that she is beautiful.

> Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking. Tacitly they had agreed not to kill each other. He fought her the way a coward fights a man—with feet, the palms of his hands, and teeth. She, in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way—with frying pans and pokers, and occasionally a flatiron would sail toward his head.

Related Characters: Cholly Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove, Pecola's parents, as deeply unhappy people who fight each other constantly. By describing the "formalism" of both their fights and their lovemaking, the narrator shows that there is a predictable choreography to their life together. This reinforces the idea that there is a sense of inevitability to the Breedloves' miserable existence, with no hope of change. The narrator's description of Cholly's cowardly way of fighting also links to Cholly's emasculation as a child, when his first sexual experience was interrupted by white men.

Meanwhile, the narrator's use of the word "feminine" to describe Mrs. Breedlove's fighting style is somewhat humorous, as whacking someone with a frying pan or poker is not necessarily behavior typically associated with femininity. On the other hand, the reference to femininity reflects the fact that Mrs. Breedlove roots her identity firmly in the domestic sphere; later in the novel, the narrator reveals that Mrs. Breedlove finds solace in the housework she performed early in her and Cholly's marriage and later for the white family who employs her.

> It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her **eyes**, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different.

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

With her parents fighting, Pecola has wished for God to make her disappear, and she imagines her body evaporating limb by limb; however, she is not able to make her eyes disappear, even in her head. The narrator then describes Pecola's wish for "different... beautiful" eyes. In the racist society in which she lives, this means blue eyes—the ultimate signifier of whiteness. Here Morrison contrasts Pecola's innocent childish daydream about having blue eyes with the dark reality of Pecola's life. At only eleven, Pecola has to deal with poverty, a violent home life, and a highly racist culture that deems her ugly for being a poor, dark-skinned black girl. She is thus robbed of any sense of a carefree, playful childhood, and internalizes the conflict around her into a deep sense of self-hatred.

Note the fact that Pecola wishes for white-looking *eyes*, as opposed to other white features such as straight hair or pale skin. This choice is significant, as it reflects the idea that surface-level beauty has a meaningful impact not only on how we are perceived by others but on how we experience life ourselves. Pecola believes that "if those eyes of hers were different... she herself would be different." The novel reinforces this point by showing that white people––as well as black people who successfully associate themselves with whiteness––are not only considered more beautiful but lead more fortunate, privileged lives. Thus although Pecola's wish is distinctly childlike, we cannot dismiss it as naïve or mistaken.

He does not see her, because there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little black girl?

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Pecola has gone to the store owned by Mr. Yacabowski to buy candy, but when she presents her three pennies Mr. Yacabowski appears to look straight through her. The narrator describes the barriers of gender, age, and especially race that prevent Mr. Yacabowski seeing Pecola––barriers that make her invisible to him in the same way that her family occupies an invisible, ghost-like position within the neighborhood. Again, this passage highlights the importance of eyes, and maintains the close association between the themes of vision and visibility and race. Morrison shows that there is no such thing as objective vision, but rather that the biases produced by racism can make a young black girl like Pecola invisible, turning her into "nothing."

To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane.

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Having bought the Mary Janes (a kind of candy) at the candy store, Pecola looks at the wrappers, which feature a smiling white girl with blond hair and blue eyes. As she eats the candy, Pecola associates this consumption with her desire to "be Mary Jane"––to have the white features that are associated with beauty. This passage shows that the link between whiteness and beauty in American culture is so pervasive that it even extends to food. Pecola cannot eat candy without being reminded that she is not white and that she is therefore not considered beautiful in the society in which she lives.

The trance-like repetition in the phrases: "Eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" conveys a sense of indoctrination. Pecola is constantly bombarded with the demand to aspire to white girlhood, a message that is transmitted through advertising, popular culture, and social interactions. Her own repetition of these commands gives the impression of mental instability, foreshadowing the fact that her desire for blue eyes (like those Mary Jane has) will eventually drive her insane.

What did love feel like? she wondered. How do grownups act when they love each other? Eat fish together? Into her eyes came the picture of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove in bed. He making sounds as through he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn't let go. Terrible as his noises were, they were not nearly as bad as the no noise at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence.

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove, Pauline Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Pecola is visiting the prostitutes who live above her family, and has asked them questions about being in love and having children. Pecola appears fixated with the concept of love, seemingly because she has no real experience of it and doesn't understand what it is like. She thinks of her parents having sex, during which Cholly makes sounds as if he is in pain, and Mrs. Breedlove stays silent, and Pecola wonders if love consists of "choking sounds and silence." Although a rather horrifying definition of love, tragically this actually foreshadows Pecola's first experience of sex, when her father rapes her. In a broader sense, it connects to the fact that all the women in *The Bluest Eye* have relationships with men that are at best dissatisfying and at worst violent and harmful.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser…what was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia and Frieda have fought with the wealthy, light-skinned new girl at school, Maureen, who called them black and ugly. As they walk home, Claudia ponders the nature of racism, incredulously wondering why anyone would think that she and her sister are inferior. In this passage Claudia's sharp understanding of how class and colorism affects the relative social position of everyone within her African American community (and beyond) contrasts with her innocent confusion about what she must "lack" in order to be deemed "lesser." This contrast works to show that, although racism and colorism operate according to their own, internally coherent logics, in a broader sense they are completely baseless and make no sense whatsoever. Claudia's rhetorical question "so what?" shows that she understands the absurdity of racism.

Despite clearly pointing to racism's ludicrousness, this passage suggests that Claudia's self-love is only possible in a state of childish innocence ("We were still in love with ourselves then"). Here Morrison suggests that this innocence, rather than hindering comprehension of the world, actually allows Claudia to see truths that others cannot. Her comfort in her own skin is a direct contrast to the Breedloves' belief that they are ugly. At the same time, this passage indicates that Claudia's feelings of self-love cannot last long, and that they are only possible in childhood.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud… The line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant.

Related Characters: Geraldine, Louis Junior

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has introduced Geraldine, a strict, uptight black woman who aspires to whiteness. Geraldine forbids her son, Junior, from playing with people she identifies as "niggers," instead insisting that he play with "colored" children. This distinction revolves around notions of "respectability" and proximity to a white ideal; once again, Morrison shows that even within African American communities, racism works to oppress those whose class and skin color are furthest from society's racist ideal of whiteness. Thus even though almost all the characters in the novel are African Americans living in a racist nation, within the black community itself there are still many levels to the hierarchy of society, and people like the Breedloves are at the very bottom.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ "He…picked at me."
"Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead Church?"
"Sort of."
"He showed his privates to you?"
"Noooo. He touched me."
"Where?"
"Here and here." She pointed to her tiny breasts that, like two fallen acorns, scattered a few faded rose leaves on her dress.
"Really? How did it feel?"
"Oh, Claudia." She Sounded put-out. I wasn't asking the right questions.
"It didn't feel like anything."
"But wasn't it supposed to? Feel good, I mean."

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer, Frieda MacTeer (speaker), Soaphead Church, Henry Washington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia has come home to find Frieda crying in her bedroom; Frieda explains that their father has beaten up Mr. Henry because Mr. Henry groped her. Once again, the children use metaphorical language to discuss sexual acts,

leaving Claudia confused about what Mr. Henry did and how it made Frieda feel. Claudia does seem to have some level of awareness about child molestation, based on the fact that she compares Mr. Henry's behavior to Soaphead Church, a known pedophile who exposes himself to young girls in the neighborhood. On the other hand, Claudia's misunderstanding is revealed by the fact that she asks Frieda if she liked it, thereby implying that Claudia is confused over the distinction between consensual sex and child abuse.

Taken in the wider context of the novel, this confusion appears rather understandable. The sexual experiences of most of the female characters in *The Bluest Eye*are imbued with force and violence, and young girls are taught almost nothing about the reality of sex, relationships, and pregnancy. It is thus not surprising that Claudia does not expect sex to be consensual, and does not link pleasure to consent. Her naïveté is shown to further harm Frieda, who is hurt by her sister's misguided questioning.

❝ Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowed like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain, white woodwork, polished cabinets, and brilliant copperware.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker), Pauline Breedlove

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia and Frieda have gone with Pecola to the house of the white family where her mother works. Claudia observes that, in her maid's uniform, Mrs. Breedlove looks nicer than she had ever seen her previously, and describes how Mrs. Breedlove's skin glows against the elegant backdrop of the kitchen. On one level, this description echoes the association of whiteness and wealth with beauty. In contrast to her shabby home in the storefront, the house where Mrs. Breedlove works is expensively furnished, and the kitchen's polished interiors seem to make Mrs. Breedlove herself look more beautiful to Claudia. This perhaps also reflects the fact that Mrs. Breedlove finds a sense of fulfilment in her domestic duties and association with the white family.

On the other hand, Claudia's statement that "Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowed like taffeta" shows that Claudia sees Mrs. Breedlove's black skin itself as beautiful. This reflects the fact that Claudia, despite the racism all around her, still retains self-love and belief that blackness can be beautiful.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another—physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap.

Related Characters: Pauline Breedlove

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

In this part of the novel, the narrator presents Mrs. Breedlove's life story, tracing the early stages of her relationship with Cholly and her first pregnancy. After becoming pregnant, Mrs. Breedlove starts going to the movies, a habit that introduces her to the "idea" of physical beauty, and specifically the equation of surface-level beauty with inner goodness. In this key passage, the narrator describes physical beauty (along with romantic love) as "the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought." Note that there is a distinction here between beauty and love as abstract, undefined concepts, and the way that they operate within society. The narrator argues that both beauty and romantic love originate in envy, meaning that they serve to place people in competition with one another, with some people judged to be superior and others inferior.

In *The Bluest Eye*, beauty is not only competitive and unjust, but an inherently racist strategy for justifying the oppression of black people. Beauty is a system that equates people's outward appearance with their inner morality. It thus functions alongside and in the exact same way as racism, and enables some people to have power over others based on distinctions that are completely meaningless and arbitrary. This passage shows that as soon as Mrs. Breedlove becomes aware of the idea of beauty and of which people her society deems beautiful, she begins to hate herself and believe that she is deserving of misfortune.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Sullen, irritable, he cultivated his hatred of Darlene. Never once did he consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, and helpless. His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess—that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke…For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence.

Related Characters: Cholly Breedlove

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148-149

Explanation and Analysis

This section of the novel is devoted to describing Cholly's history, including his first sexual experience. What began as an innocent and positive interaction between Cholly and a young black girl called Darlene turns sour and violent when the couple are discovered by a pair of white men, who force them to keep having sex while the men watch and taunt them. This episode comes to define Cholly as a person, instilling in him a deep sense of shame and self-contempt, along with a lifelong violent hatred of women.

This passage explains Cholly's seemingly illogical reaction of blaming himself and especially Darlene for the incident instead of resenting the white men for their sadistic actions. The narrator explains that it would have been impossible for Cholly to direct his anger at the white men precisely because they are so much more powerful than him, and his inevitable powerlessness in the face of their domination would thus have "burned him up." Morrison uses this passage to show how white people's oppression of black men can evolve into a cycle of cruelty and violence in which black men misdirect their pain, inflicting it on the black women around them.

His soul seemed to slip down into his guts and fly into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made—a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon.

Related Characters: Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Cholly has arrived home so drunk that he is barely able to recognize his surroundings. He approaches Pecola, who is washing dishes, and rapes her. Pecola is so shocked that she remains rigidly still and silent, only making a sound when Cholly ejaculates. This sound connects to Pecola's earlier observation that, when her parents have sex, the only thing she can hear is silence and choking noises––leading her to associate these sounds with sex and love.

In this passage, the sound Pecola makes is compared to a rapidly deflating balloon, implying that her whole self has been instantly crushed and hollowed by the rape. This is juxtaposed with the description of Cholly's soul "fly[ing] into her," suggesting that all the misery and trauma of Cholly's life––trauma that itself originated in an act of sexual violence––has been transferred to his daughter.

Chapter 10 Quotes

I thought of the baby that everybody wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with great O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes…no synthetic yellow bangs suspended over marble-blue eyes, no pinched nose and bowline mouth. More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live—just to counteract the universal love of baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker), Pecola Breedlove, Maureen Peal

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia and Frieda have heard rumors that Pecola is pregnant with her father's baby, and they are the only ones in the neighborhood who sympathize with Pecola. In contrast to the rest of the community, Claudia hopes the baby lives, and muses that if the baby was wanted, this would be a counteracting force to the glorification of whiteness that pervades American society. She imagines a vision of the baby, using positive terms to describe its blackness ("clean black eyes"), and framing white features as

ugly ("synthetic yellow bangs... pinched nose"). This echoes Claudia's earlier feelings of resentment toward the white baby dolls, suggesting that this resentment is born out of a noble and necessary desire to reverse the automatic association of whiteness and beauty.

The fact that Claudia and Frieda are alone in wanting the baby to live, however, does not bode well; this suggests that the adults in their community have accepted blackness as ugly, an acceptance that makes them unable to sympathize with Pecola (despite the fact that she is clearly a victim who has done nothing wrong). In this sense, the novel is not very optimistic––after all, Pecola's baby does not survive, Pecola goes insane, and there seems to be a sense of inevitability to Claudia and Freida losing their innocence and self-love.

❝ We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious, and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us—not then.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia and Frieda realize they are alone in wanting Pecola's baby to survive, and Claudia describes this as a familiar feeling, reflecting the fact that she and her sister have always existed in a world of their own. As young black girls, Claudia and Frieda are belittled on account of their race, gender, and age; they have no access to structural power and are not taken seriously by anyone around them. However, rather than responding to this by accepting their lowly status, the sisters grow determined to figure out the world for themselves: "Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves."

Although Morrison presents this as somewhat "arrogant" and naïve, she also emphasizes that it is only through maintaining a strong sense of self-worth in the face of societal prejudice that Claudia and Frieda are able to live happy and meaningful lives. Unlike the Breedloves, who accept and believe that they are ugly, Claudia and Frieda refuse to know their own "limitations." One the one hand, the girls' determination might be interpreted as doomed; the retrospective angle of the narrative suggests that their fearless attitude will not necessarily last, and their scheme with God to get Pecola's baby to live ultimately fails. However, regardless of these facts, Morrison implies that the girls' strategy of stubborn self-love is still the right course of action, as in a rigidly racist society it provides the only hope for maintaining dignity and compassion.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ The birdlike gestures are worn away to a mere picking and plucking her way between the tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milkweed, among all the waste and beauty of the world—which is what she herself was. All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker), Pecola Breedlove

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

In the final section of the novel, Pecola's baby has died and she has gone mad; she lives alone with her mother, shunned by society. Claudia describes Pecola both as existing among waste and being a form of waste herself, having absorbed the community's hatred and shame. This passage shows that oppressed groups of people––such as the African American community depicted in the novel––often use individuals like Pecola to make them feel better about themselves.

Claudia's statement that the community's beauty belonged to Pecola first and that she "gave" it to them might at first seem strange, as throughout the novel Morrison emphasizes that Pecola and her family are considered to be absolutely and essentially ugly. However, recall that in the passage about physical beauty from the chapter about Mrs. Breedlove, Morrison defines beauty as inherently competitive, a system designed to pit people against one another. With this concept in mind, it makes sense that Claudia describes the community's beauty as originating with Pecola––it is only by sacrificing Pecola, by using her as an example of ugliness, that the rest of the community can consider itself beautiful.

> Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

Claudia has conceded that some people did love Pecola, including the prostitutes and Cholly, but that this did not amount to much––and in the case of Cholly, it in fact proved "fatal." This passage directly contradicts the idea that love is inherently redemptive. Claudia's words suggest that love, rather than being a positive thing, is at best neutral, and in fact often has highly destructive results. The final sentence conveys how being loved can leave one totally vulnerable to another person. This coheres with the statement earlier in the novel that romantic love and physical beauty are the most destructive ideas in human culture.

> It was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to the **marigolds** that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live.

Related Characters: Claudia MacTeer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

In the final paragraph of the novel, Claudia connects Pecola's fate directly to the marigolds. Just as "the soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers," so is society as we know it bad for certain kinds of people, such as poor black girls like Pecola, who are told they are ugly and shunned by their communities. With this analogy, Morrison suggests that no one person is to blame for the fact that the community was a "hostile" environment in which there was no possibility for Pecola to thrive. However, she emphasizes that the people in the community are at fault for refusing to recognize and acknowledge this injustice; instead of sympathizing with Pecola and attempting to help her, they accept her fate as fair, saying that she had "no right to live."

Although the novel ends on this rather dark and pessimistic note, it is possible to see a glimmer of hope through the characters of Claudia and Frieda, who defy society's demands by sympathizing with Pecola and trying to save her baby by planting the marigolds. While Claudia implicates herself in the community's shunning of Pecola, there is evidence in the narrative that Claudia symbolizes the possibility of change to come by caring about Pecola, maintaining self-love, and refusing to believe that blackness is inherently ugly or inferior.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE SECTION 1

The first section of the prologue is written in the style of a Dick and Jane Primer. In the Dick and Jane narrative, Mother, Father, Dick and Jane, live in a pretty green house. Jane asks her mother and father to play, but they won't. Then, she sees a dog and a cat, but they run from her. Finally, Jane sees a friend who will play with her.

Opening with the Dick and Jane narrative provides the reader with a representation of the ideal home, family, race, and standard of beauty. The passage also offers a thematic overview of the novel as a whole. The lack of response from Jane's parents alludes to the family dynamics and isolation many of the novel's characters experience at home. The dog and cat running from Jane foreshadows the violence perpetrated against animals in the novel. Finally, Jane a friend to play with, which reflects the close relationships the novel's young black female characters engage in.

The Dick and Jane narrative is repeated two more times. Through each repetition the words remain exactly the same, but with each recurrence of the words, the paragraph loses some of its structure and clarity. In the first reiteration, the paragraph is devoid of punctuation. Immediately following the first, the final repetition of the paragraph not only lacks punctuation, but also all of the spaces between the words. The progressive lack of structure in the paragraph transforms the narrative into a rambling and disorienting block of text.

The breakdown of the paragraph structure reflects the breakdown of home and family in The Bluest Eye. The novel's black and often broken families exist in stark contrast to the white, middle class, nuclear family in the Dick and Jane narrative. The lack of clarity and feeling of turbulence created by the unstructured paragraph mimics the sense of pressure that these outside ideals—which they can never live up to—place upon the young black female characters

PROLOGUE SECTION 2

An unnamed narrator (later revealed to be Claudia) explains that no **marigolds** bloomed in 1941. At that time, the narrator and her sister (later revealed to be Frieda) believe that the flowers did not bloom because Pecola had been raped by her father, Cholly, and was pregnant with his baby. Although the community believes the baby would be better off dead, the narrator and her sister pray the baby will live. As a sacrifice for the unborn baby, they bury their money and plant marigold seeds, hoping that if they say the right words over them, the flowers would bloom and the baby would live. When the **marigolds** don't sprout and Pecola's baby dies, the girls believe it is their fault for not planting the marigolds correctly.

The community's wish for the death of Pecola's baby shows the extent to which racial, sexual, and social oppression negatively affects the novel's characters. For the community, the birth of Pecola's baby would symbolize and reveal the racial self-hatred and self-perceived ugliness that exist, but remain hidden, within the community. The narrator and her sister, however, have not been damaged to the extent that other community members have, and remain unaware of the baby's significance. As a result, they have enough compassion to desire the baby's survival.

For years, the narrator believes that she had planted the seeds too deep in the earth, and felt guilty about the baby's death. Eventually, however, she comes to believe that the earth itself was unyielding, and that their hopes of saving the baby were just as futile as Cholly's lust for his own child. In the end of the passage, the narrator states that it would be too difficult to understand *why* all of this happened, so instead, she decides to share *how* it occurred.

As a child, the narrator believed she could change the outcome of Pecola's pregnancy, but as a woman, she comes to understand her own powerlessness. The unyielding earth is a metaphor for the social realities of black women in 1941. The narrator and her sister were completely powerless over the conditions that allowed this atrocity to occur, and had no control over the outcome. Through telling how *it happened, however, the narrative reveals the reasons* why *it occurred.*

CHAPTER 1

Claudia and Frieda stand outside of a Greek hotel, watching their neighbor Rosemary Villanucci eat bread and butter in her father's Buick. Rosemary rolls the window down and tells Claudia and Frieda they can't come in. Afterward, Claudia imagines leavening red marks on Rosemary's white skin. During the violent fantasy, Claudia imagines Rosemary will ask her if she wants her to pull her pants down. By asking this, Claudia knows that Rosemary will be offering her something sacred, which she must decline to assert her own pride.

Rosemary denies Claudia and Frieda access based on the color of their skin. Claudia's subsequent desire to leave marks on Rosemary's white skin highlights the importance of race in the conflict. The fact that Claudia imagines Rosemary will offer to pull her pants down during this violent fantasy introduces the force of oppression on women through their sexuality, and the connection between sexuality and violence.

School has just started for Claudia and Frieda. In the evening, grown-ups take them to Zick's Coal Company to collect coal that has fallen from railroad cars to heat their house. The house is old, cold, and green. Some of the rooms are lit with kerosene lamps, but others remain dark and occupied by roaches and mice.

The fact that Claudia and Frieda collect coal that has fallen from passing trains speaks to their family's financial challenges. The condition of their house contrasts the idealized home introduced in the opening Dick and Jane section, but regardless of its condition, the house is their own, which remains an important part of their identity and sense of worth as a family.

One day, after a trip to collect coal for the house, Claudia gets a cold. Claudia's mother, Mrs. MacTeer, scolds her for not wearing something on her head while outside. In bed, Claudia feels guilty about her illness. She doesn't understand that her mother's anger is not directed at her, but at her illness. That night, Frieda comes into the room and sings to her, and later, another unnamed family member comes in to wrap her in blankets. Despite the scolding, Claudia can feel that there is love in the house.

As a young girl, Claudia does not understand that her mother's maternal concern for her welfare manifests as anger at the illness. She feels guilty about getting sick, even though this is not her mother's intention. Although her mother scolds her, Claudia still feels she is surrounded by love, which distinguishes her from other characters in the novel.

A new boarder named Mr. Henry comes to stay with the MacTeers. Before he arrives, Claudia and Frieda listen to their mother gossip with her friends about Miss Delia, the woman who Mr. Henry used to board with. The women talk about how Miss Delia has lost her mind. They blame her mental health issues on her husband, who left her for another woman. Then the women begin talking about Mr. Henry. They question why he has never married. Initially, someone suggests Mr. Henry is just picky, but then someone else suggests there are no desirable women in town. They conclude he is just sensible.

Under the burden of male oppression, the novel's women use gossip and slander as a way to attain a sense of power. While gossiping, the women's suggestion that her husband drove Miss Delia to insanity speaks to the tragic outcome of male oppression. The conclusion that Mr. Henry is sensible for not marrying speaks to the way the novel's women characters negatively perceive one another.

When Mr. Henry arrives, the girls are not introduced to him, but pointed out by their mother along with the furniture and rooms of the house. Claudia and Frieda are surprised when Mr. Henry speaks to them. "You must be Greta Garbo, and you must be Ginger Roberts," he says to the girls. Once they have been introduced, Mr. Henry pulls out a penny and asks the girls if they'd like it. When Claudia reaches out for it, Mr. Henry snaps his fingers and the penny disappears. The girls search Mr. Henry's body, putting their fingers in his socks, and looking up the backside of his jacket, but never find the penny.

By associating Claudia and Frieda with Greta Garbo and Ginger Roberts, who were white actresses, Mr. Henry alludes to the standard of white beauty existing at the time of the novel. By making the penny disappear, Mr. Henry tricks Claudia and Frieda into touching his body. This scene foreshadows Mr. Henry's attraction to young girls, which is revealed later when he assaults Frieda.

Not long after Mr. Henry moves in, Pecola Breedlove also comes to stay with the MacTeers. The county places Pecola with the MacTeers because her father, Cholly, burned their house down. Claudia explains that Cholly put the family "outdoors", which is different than being homeless and seen as a great sin by the community.

Through the act of burning down his house, Cholly blatantly desecrates the sanctity of home and family. The act has a devastating effect on the way the community views Pecola and the Breedlove family.

During her stay, Pecola obsessively drinks milk from a Shirley Temple cup owned by the MacTeers. Pecola and Frieda gush over Shirley Temple's beauty. Claudia, however, hates Shirley Temple in the same way she hates the white baby dolls she receives for Christmas. Still younger than Pecola and Frieda, She doesn't understand why those around find the baby dolls and Temple so lovable and beautiful. Claudia's only desire is to dismember the dolls in order to understand what makes them so desirable to those around her. Over time, this urge to dismember the dolls transforms into a desire to harm little white girls. Claudia explains that she feels guilty about these urges, so she hides them behind a fabricated love for Temple and the baby dolls. This fabricated love, however, eventually turns into genuine worship of Shirley Temple.

Pecola and Frieda's devotion to Shirley Temple speaks to the influence of beauty and racial standards over the novel's characters. At first, Claudia does not feel the same affection for Shirley temple, but over time, she also becomes obsessed with white culture. Once Claudia's desire to destroy the dolls results in the urge to harm white girls, she feels immense guilt. She hides this guilt behind a false love, which eventually leads to obsession with the thing she originally wanted to destroy. This process depicts the way black hatred of white cultural oppression and beauty standards can result in black obsession with white culture.

One Saturday afternoon, Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia are outside on the house's stoop trying to avoid Mrs. MacTeer who is upset because Pecola drank three quarts of milk. As the girls try to figure out what to do that afternoon, Pecola begins to menstruate for the first time. The sight of the blood scares Pecola, but Frieda eases her worry by telling her not to worry, she is only "ministratin", which is how she pronounces menstruating. Frieda sends Claudia inside to get a glass of water to clean the blood from the steps. Frieda begins helping Pecola while Claudia cleans the steps. As she cleans, Claudia feels like she is missing out on something important. When she finishes washing the blood from the step, she rushes around the corner of the house to where Frieda is helping Pecola.

Pecola's obsession with Shirley Temple leads to her drink an obscene amount of milk, which upsets Mrs. MacTeer. The fact that a black girl drinks so much (white) milk symbolizes Pecola's wish to internalize whiteness. Pecola's fear during her first menstruation alludes to both the dangers of being a woman and Pecola's complete unfamiliarity with the realities of being a woman. Likewise, Frieda's mispronunciation of the word "menstruate" and Claudia's feeling of being left out further emphasizes the girls' innocence.

As they help her pin a pad to her dress to tamp the bleeding, Claudia notices Rosemary, the white girl who lives next door, watching them through the bushes. Claudia grabs Rosemary's face and scratches her nose. Rosemary then hollers for Mrs. MacTeer, claiming the girls are "playing nasty". Upon hearing this, Mrs. MacTeer rushes out and begins lashing Frieda with a switch. After lashing Frieda, she grabs Pecola to punish her the same way, but when she does, the pad falls from between Pecola's legs. When Mrs. MacTeer sees the pad, and allows the girls a moment to explain that they were trying to help Pecola, she feels sorry for what she's done. Mrs. MacTeer takes the girls inside of the house and goes into the bathroom with Pecola. Over the sound of the running bath water, Claudia and Frieda hear their mother's laughter as she helps Pecola get cleaned up.

Rosemary's accusation that the girls are "playing nasty" associates Pecola's menstruation with a forbidden act of sexuality. Once Claudia scratches Rosemary's nose, an element of racial violence enters the scene, which erupts once Mrs. MacTeer begins lashing Frieda. The overt presence of violence in this scene foreshadows the violence the black female characters encounter upon passing into womanhood. Once Mrs. MacTeer realizes the nature of the situation, however, she feels sorry, sympathizing with Pecola's fear and shame. In the end, the physical separation between the characters distinguishes Pecola and Mrs. MacTeer as women, whereas Claudia and Frieda are still girls.

That night in bed, Claudia and Frieda are full of awe and respect for Pecola. Pecola asks Frieda if her menstruation means she can have a baby now. When Frieda says she can, Pecola asks how. Frieda explains that someone must love her first. Pecola asks how to get someone to love her, but Frieda is already asleep, and Claudia doesn't have an answer.

Claudia and Frieda recognize the significance of Pecola's passage into womanhood, but their naivety with regard to womanhood suggests they are unaware of the perils of this passage. They are still innocent girls—they think love is required in the making of a baby. Pecola's question of how to make someone love her forebodes her path over the rest of the novel.

CHAPTER 2

An unnamed narrator tells of a storefront in downtown Loraine, Ohio. To people walking by, the look of the storefront space is both "irritating and melancholy". But the space was not always perceived this way. The narrator begins moving back in time, explaining that the storefront was once a pizza shop where teenage boys used to hang out and smoke cigarettes. The boys would flick their cigarettes too often, revealing to others that they were novices. Before it was a pizza shop, the storefront housed a bakery owned by a Hungarian baker who was renowned for his brioche and poppy-seed roles. Even before that, the storefront was the base of operations for a Gypsy family who decorated the windows with velvet draperies and Oriental rugs.

The idea of home goes beyond the physical structure of a building. Before the Breedloves occupied the storefront, it embodied a sense of home. The cigarette smoking boys are depicted in an endearing way, the baker arouses the pleasure of a home's kitchen, and the Gypsy family decorates the space with beautiful drapes and rugs. The people who live in a space, therefore, are responsible for creating a sense of home.

The Breedloves move into the storefront after Cholly gets out of jail for setting their previous residence on fire. They live anonymously inside of the space, lacking any connection to the community at large. The storefront is separated into different rooms with beaverboard planks: a living room, which the Breedloves refer to as the front room, a bedroom that they all share and where all of the living is done, and a kitchen. Despite the close living quarters, the family members are isolated from one other, each living in his or her "own cell of consciousness".

The Breedloves completely lack a sense of home and family. Their disconnection form one another and indifference to the condition of the storefront also lead to their disconnection from the community at large. In addition, a sense of home and family are defining factors in the way an individual is perceived by others in the community.

The narrator then focuses on the apartment's furnishings. The items in the apartment have no meaning to the Breedloves. Most items in the house have no memories attached to them. The items that do have memories associated with them produce a negative physical reaction in the Breedloves. The couch in particular is a source of pain and anger. Cholly believed the couch was new when he bought it, but it arrives with a giant rip in the upholstery. When Cholly tried to return it, the deliveryman man refused. The couch becomes a source of shame and anger for the family, leading to indifference toward the apartment as a whole. The narrator also mentions the coal stove, which seems to have a mind of its own, deciding whether or not to stay warm. No matter what, the stove always burns out in the morning.

The items in the apartment symbolize the Breedlove's lack of home and family. The couch in particular becomes a symbol of the family's situation. The rip in the upholstery connects to the perceived ugliness of the family, and also reveals the couch's cheap frame, an image that alludes to the Breedlove's frail family structure. The fact that he couldn't return the couch constantly reminds Cholly of his own powerlessness as a black man. The stove furthers this idea of powerlessness, as it operates out of the control of the family, and leaves the house cold each morning, just as they are cold to each other.

CHAPTER 3

An unnamed narrator explains that the Breedloves live in a decrepit storefront. They live there because they are poor and black, but they *stay* in the squalid conditions because they believe they are ugly. To those outside the family, the Breedlove's intense ugliness does not center in any particular physical feature. The ugliness goes beyond their small, closely set eyes, irregular hairlines, heavy eyebrows, and insolent nostrils, stemming from their own belief that they are ugly. It is as if some "master had said, 'you are ugly people," and the family accepted this statement as true. For the Breedloves, every billboard, movie, and glance supports this statement. While Cholly is the only family member whose ugliness is derived from his own actions, the other family members are regarded as ugly through their association with him.

The fact that the Breedloves stay in the storefront because they believe they are ugly demonstrates the debilitating effect of an internalized sense of ugliness on the novel's characters. In The Bluest Eye, ugliness and beauty go beyond one's physical appearance. Ugliness is defined (and self-defined) through one's race, socioeconomic class, educational background, and actions, and the characters are inundated with images of white beauty in popular culture. Likewise, ugliness can be derived by association, as shown by the Breedlove family's relationship with Cholly.

On a Saturday morning in October, Mrs. Breedlove awakes to a cold house. She enters the kitchen and begins making a commotion. Mrs. Breedlove has a disabled leg that causes her to limp, making her good leg thump against the floor as she walks. Pecola, who is awake in bed, hears pots and pans clanging together, and perceives her mother's ruckus as a threat to Cholly, who came home drunk the night before. Every time Cholly comes home drunk, a fight breaks out between him and Mrs. Breedlove, and since there was no fight the night before, Pecola is certain one will occur that morning. As Pecola listens to her mother in the kitchen, she can smell whiskey on her father's breath.

The coldness of the house can be read both literally and figuratively. The house is literally cold because of the Breedlove's economic challenges, but figuratively it is cold because there is no love among the family members. Mrs. Breedlove first chooses a passive method to threaten Cholly—banging dishes together in the kitchen—which demonstrates the oppression of black women in the novel—she can't address him directly. The fact that Pecola expects a fight shows how common violence is in her home.

Eventually, Mrs. Breedlove comes back into the bedroom and attempts to wake Cholly. She tells him the stove needs coal. Cholly opens his eyes, which are red and menacing, and promptly refuses to get up. He tells Mrs. Breedlove he doesn't care how she gets it, but he isn't doing it. In response to his refusal, Mrs. Breedlove berates him for not providing for the family. If she didn't work, she says, the family would "all be dead." Cholly stops responding, but Mrs. Breedlove persists until Cholly tells her that if she keeps talking, he is going to "split her open." Mrs. Breedlove submits, telling Cholly that if she sneezes even once, God better help him because she will retaliate.

Cholly's refusal to help his wife shows his lack of responsibility for his family. This indifference toward his family is further demonstrated as Mrs. Breedlove accuses him of not providing. Mrs. Breedlove accusation that she alone keeps the family alive is both angry and gives her a sense of superiority—she seems to both want Cholly to help and to thrive on the fact that she must bear this burden alone. When Cholly threatens to "split her open" and Mrs. Breed threatens to harm him if she sneezes even once because of the cold, it shows the violent nature of the relationship, and foreshadows the events to follow.

The narrator explains that even though Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove constantly fight, they depend on each other to maintain their individual identities. For Mrs. Breedlove, these quarrels bring a sense of relief to the tedium of her poverty, and bring the dull rooms of the storefront to life. She perceives her marriage with Cholly as a burden she must bear as a good Christian woman. She depends on Cholly's continued immorality, as it allows her to maintain her role as a righteous Christian woman. Cholly likewise needs Mrs. Breedlove. She is one of the few things in his life upon which he is able to unload his "inarticulate fury" and "aborted desires". The narrator explains that Cholly's hatred for women was instilled in him during his first sexual experience. Two white men stumbled upon him and the girl, named Darlene, whom he was having sex with and shone a flashlight on his behind. When he halted the sexual act, the white men forced him to continue. Unable to direct his hatred toward the white men, he turns the hatred to the girl, which develops into a hatred of women that continues with him into adulthood.

Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove's relationship shows the damaging effects of racism, sexism, and violence in the characters' lives. As a black woman, Mrs. Breedlove searches desperately for a sense of self-worth and meaning for her life. It is only through her relationship with Cholly—a man—that she gains these things. Their fights break up the tedium of her life and spark her imagination, but this way of creating meaning for her life is at the expense of her physical and emotional wellbeing. Cholly's immorality allows her to feel superior and self-righteous, and those are the feeling on which she props herself up, on which she survives. Likewise, Cholly stays with Mrs. Breedlove because he needs someone to unload the hatred instilled in him as a boy by two racist men.

The narrator then explains that Pecola and her brother Sammy respond to the violence in different ways. Sammy curses, and often throws himself into the middle of his parents' arguments. He is known to run away, having left more than twenty-seven times before he was fourteen. Pecola on the other hand, being younger than Sammy and also a girl, tries different methods of endurance. These methods vary, but each is just as painful as the last. When they fight, she disassociates from her body and wishes one of her parents would kill the other, or that she herself would die.

The children's different ways of responding to the violence demonstrate different realities individuals face based on genders. Samuel, a young boy, actively engages with his parents while they argue, and escapes the situation by running away. Pecola, however, as a young girl, remains passive and turns inward. These coping methods reflect the realities of the men and woman in The Bluest Eye.

As Pecola waits for the storefront apartment to erupt in violence, she whispers to herself, "Don't, Mrs. Breedlove, don't." Eventually, Mrs. Breedlove inevitably sneezes, and as she promised, she starts the fight with Cholly by throwing a glass of cold water in his face. Cholly rises from bed naked and attacks Mrs. Breedlove. A brutal fight ensues, Cholly using his hands and feet, and Mrs. Breedlove using a dishpan. They struggle until Sammy jumps in and begins hitting Cholly in the head. Seizing the opportunity, Mrs. Breedlove grabs the stove lid and hits Cholly over the head twice with it, knocking him unconscious. Once Cholly is unconscious, Mrs. Breedlove covers him with a blanket. Sammy begins yelling at his mother to kill Cholly. She tells him to be quiet, and as she walks back into the kitchen, commands him to get up and go get some coal.

Talking to herself and quietly begging her mother not to start the fight demonstrates Pecola's powerlessness, both as a child and as a girl. Sammy, to the contrary, jumps in and aids his mother. Samuel begging his mother to kill his father reveals his hatred for Cholly, but his request mirrors his father's violence toward the family. Mrs. Breedlove tells him to shut up, and tells him to go get coal, a gesture that demonstrates her authority over him, and again links him to Cholly, who she originally asked to get the coal. Sammy is being nurtured to have the same sort of hate that Cholly feels—the cycle is continuing.

When the fight is over, Pecola experiences "the sick feeling" she gets in her stomach whenever her parents fight. She asks God if he will make her disappear, and closing her eyes, feels her body begin to fade away, starting with her arms and moving toward her stomach. With some struggle, she imagines her stomach and face disappear, but her tightly closed eyes remain. The narrator explains that Pecola believes possessing **blue eyes** would make her beautiful, and things would change at home and school. She has prayed for blue eyes for a year, but in clinging to the idea that only a miracle could save her, she is never able to recognize her own inner beauty because she is only ever looking at other people's eyes.

For Pecola, attaining blue eyes means two things: that people will see her as beautiful, and that the way she sees the world with change, so that she will no longer have to witness the violence and hatred in her home. Beauty to the characters of The Bluest Beauty means empowerment, and Pecola believes that if she can attain blue eyes, a signifier of whiteness and beauty, she will have the power to escape her horrible situation. Holding on to this unreachable standard of beauty, however, means that Pecola remains unable to realize her worth and own beauty, inner or outer.

Pecola walks to Yacobowski's Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries, a store in the neighborhood that sells penny candy. As she walks, she feels comforted by the familiar images she sees—the cracked sidewalk and dandelions in the fields beside her. She feels a sense of ownership over these things, and they connect her to the world. She ponders a patch of dandelions at the base of a telephone pole, wondering why everyone detests the dandelions, and calls them weeds. She can't understand why black women pick them, but throw away the yellow heads, keeping only the leaves and stems for dandelion wine and soup. Unlike those around her, Pecola is fond of the dandelions.

Pecola's self-perceived ugliness allows her to identify with the cracked sidewalk and the dandelions, which are things considered ugly by others. Pecola does not see the dandelions as ugly, which introduces the idea that beauty might be a matter of one's perception, not something inherent in the object being looked at. Unfortunately, Pecola's obsession with external beauty standards keeps her from realizing this about herself. The "yellow heads" of the dandelions also connect symbolically to the blond haired girls, who represent the white beauty standard, and explains Pecola's confusion as to why the black women throw them away.

When Pecola enters Yacobowski's, She stands at the counter looking at the candy. She decides to spend all of her money, three pennies, on Mary Janes. When she pulls the pennies from her shoe, Mr. Yacobowsky looks up at her with his blue eyes. Although Mr. Yacobowski looks at Pecola, his eyes draw back, as if he sees right through her. Pecola notices a complete lack of human recognition in his eyes and recognizes it as a trait that exists in the eyes of all white people she's encountered. She assumes Mr. Yacobowski's distaste must be for her blackness, which is static and dreadful, even though her internal emotional state is in motion.

Pecola's feeling that Mr. Yacobowsky sees right through her demonstrates both the way whites perceive blacks as worthless, and also Pecola's sense that she is not even worth being looked at. The distinction between Pecola's external appearance and her inward emotional reality suggests that even though Mr. Yacobowski sees her only as a worthless black girl, there is a reality beneath her black skin that makes her human, that makes her worth acknowledgment.

Unable to speak, Pecola points at the Mary Janes. Mr. Yacobowski gets frustrated, as he can't understand what kind of candy Pecola wants. He cannot see from her angle, so he moves agitatedly his hand around the glass case where the candy is kept. When his hand brushes the Mary Janes, Pecola nods. When he asks how many she wants, she holds out the three pennies. When he pushes the candies toward her, she holds out the pennies, but Mr. Yacobowski does not want to touch her hand. Eventually, he grabs the pennies, grazing Pecola's hand with his fingernails.

Pecola's inability to communicate with Mr. Yacobowski shows the divide between her as a black girl and him as a white man. Likewise, Mr. Yacobowski's inability to see from Pecola's perspective metaphorically shows the disparity between the way he sees the world as a white immigrant man, and how she sees it as a black girl. By not wanting to touch her hand, Mr. Yacobowski's racism shows glaringly. The way he grazes her hand with his fingernail subtly suggests the violent nature of racism, as other references to fingernails in the novel involve overt violence, for example, Claudia scratching Rosemary's white face.

Outside of the store, Pecola feels ashamed of herself. She notices the dandelions again and calls them ugly, perceiving them as weeds. As she has this realization, she trips on a crack in the sidewalk. Her shame turns to anger then, which she prefers because it has a reality and a presence. But when she thinks about Mr. Yacobowski's **blue eyes** again, the shame returns and stays until she remembers the Mary Janes. Each piece of candy has a picture of Mary Jane on it, blond haired, blue eyed, and smiling. Mary Jane's eyes are petulant, but to Pecola they are simply pretty. The narrator explains that, "to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane."

The change in Pecola's perception after her experience in the store shows the way in which racism has a powerful effect on the way one perceives oneself and the world. Beauty may be a matter of perception, but it understandably doesn't feel that way to Pecola as the interaction with Yacobowski makes her feel inherently and objectively ugly. While the shame makes her feel invisible, the anger gives her a sense of power, but that power is short-lived because it is based not on a sense of worth but her lack of worth. As soon she remembers how Yacobowski's blue eyes—the symbols of his being better than her—saw right through her, her anger turns back to shame. The Mary Jane candies then become a kind of salve to this wound—they are sweet and allow Pecola to not only feel connected to but actually consume the white culture that makes her feel inferior. Yet at the same time they are temporary, and therefore addictive, and actually reinforce her sense of inferiority. They provide Pecola a strength that is not otherwise inside her, that is not her own, and so she is dependent on white culture to soothe the pain that it instills in her—a vicious cycle.

Pecola visits three prostitutes—China, Poland, and Miss Marie—who live above her family. She hears Poland singing a blues song as she approaches the apartment. The prostitutes welcome Pecola, who watches them get ready for work that evening. Pecola asks Miss Marie why she has so many boyfriends, which is her term for their clients. Miss Marie responds by telling Pecola she hasn't seen a boy since 1927. The prostitutes laugh at this, and tease one another affectionately about their ages and bodies.

The prostitutes, who are considered ugly and abhorrent by the community, welcome Pecola into their home without judgment. They have compassion because they have felt a sense of ugliness in their own lives. Pecola's naive view of their clients as "boyfriends" shows her innocence regarding love and sex. Even though their work and living situation is taboo, the prostitutes share a sense of home and family.

Miss Marie tells Pecola about two of her boyfriends. One of the men she turned into the F.B.I. for a sum of money, and other, Dewey Prince, was her true love who she left once she found out she could make money as a prostitute. The narrator explains that these women are not like the romanticized images of prostitutes found in novels. They are not girls driven to prostitution by tragic circumstance, nor are they sloppy whores who can't make a living. These prostitutes are tough, independent, and unforgiving in their hatred for men.

For these women, exploiting their sexuality becomes the only way they are able to gain some sense of power over men. This decision, however, comes at a great expense. Not only did Miss Marie leave the love of her life to gain this power, but the women are not respected in the community. Likewise, even though they hate men, their sense of self is still dependent on their relation to men.

When Pecola asks Miss Marie if she has any children, she says that she does. She immediately pulls a pin from her hair and begins picking her teeth with it, indicating she doesn't want to talk anymore. Realizing this, Pecola goes to the window and begins thinking about the way Dewey Prince loved Miss Marie. She wonders what love feels like, and thinks of her parents when they have sex. During the sexual act, Cholly makes awful noises like he is in pain, and Mrs. Breedlove remains completely quiet as if she was not even there. Pecola thinks maybe this is love, "choking sounds and silence."

Miss Marie's actions after Pecola brings up her children shows that, despite her tough exterior, she is sensitive toward issues of family. Pecola's naiveté is further depicted as she wonders what love feels like. Using the only model she has, her own family, she decides that love must be related to sex, violence, and lack of interaction.

CHAPTER 4

Claudia explains that winter has arrived and her father's appearance and demeanor has changed. His features take on the characteristics of winter, his brow like a cliff of snow, and his skin becomes pale and cheerless. He works day and night to keep the cold from infiltrating the house, teaching his daughters how to tend to the fire.

Mr. MacTeer's concern about keeping the house warm demonstrates the family's less than ideal financial situation, but both his concern and dedication to showing the girls how to take care of the home shows his love and desire to empower, as opposed to oppress, his girls. In the novel, warmth is associated with this feeling of love between family, while cold is associated with the opposite.

Claudia and Frieda persist in boredom, waiting for spring to come, but then the monotony of winter is broken by the arrival of a new girl at school named Maureen Peal. Maureen is a light skinned black girl with green eyes. She comes from a wealthy family, owns nice clothes, and brings good food for lunch. She enchants the entire school—the teachers encourage her, and the other students treat her with the utmost respect.

Maureen's arrival complicates the issue of race in the novel. Although Maureen is half black, she possesses signifiers of whiteness—green eyes, wealth, and beauty. Maureen demonstrates that whiteness exists on a spectrum and is not only judged by the color of one's skin, but also one's class, education, and family. The way the other classmates respect her also shows that there are gradations of race within the black community, and that those closest to white are treated with the most respect. The black community has, broadly, adopted the value of the white culture that oppresses it, just as Pecola has specifically.

Claudia and Frieda are "bemused, irritated and fascinated" by Maureen Peal. Her expensive clothing and plentiful lunches shame the girls' ragged clothing and meager lunches. In response to the shame they feel, they search out Maureen's flaws. First they begin calling her "Meringue Pie", and eventually discover that she has a dog tooth and a little bump on each hand where her "sixth finger" had been removed. They use these things to insult Maureen, but do it alone because the other students remain loyal to Maureen.

Maureen's entrance into the novel demonstrates the way the novel's young female characters develop a sense of self and self-hatred based on external references. Maureen's wealth, beauty, and popularity makes Claudia feel that she is lacking. Searching out Maureen's flaws and using them against her demonstrates the cyclical nature of racial hatred and oppression. That Claudia and Frieda do this only while alone, though, shows how impotent such behavior is, and how while making them feel empowered it also makes them feel ashamed, which only drives their hatred (and self-hatred) further.

Maureen is assigned the locker next to Claudia's. Claudia knows she is about to become friends with Maureen, but knows it will be a "dangerous friendship", because she still experiences violent urges when she compares herself to Maureen. Eventually, they get to know each other and Claudia begins to be able to talk to her without wishing violent things upon Maureen. One day, Maureen asks Claudia if she and Frieda want to walk home with her. As they exit the school, they notice a group of black boys surrounding Pecola. As they dance around Pecola, they taunt her for her dark skin and shout that her father sleeps naked. Pecola stands in the middle of the circle crying with her hands over her eyes. Claudia explains that the boys' contempt for their own blackness drives their assault on Pecola.

Although Maureen and Claudia agree to be friends, Claudia knows it will be a "dangerous friendship" because the barriers between them based on race and class will still exist. As Claudia explains, the black boys demonstrate the way in which racial self-hatred and shame are externalized and directed toward other black individuals.

Frieda steps in and hits one of the boys in the head with a book. When the boy fails to retaliate, Claudia wonders if the boy stops because Claudia is taller than him, because of the look in her eyes, which reminds Claudia of their mother's eyes, or because the boy has a crush on Frieda. Frieda tells the boy to leave Pecola alone or she will "tell everyone what he did". Another boy then responds, telling the girls to move along, but Claudia calls him a bullet head. He steps forward, and drawing his hand back asks Claudia if she wants a fat lip. Before he can swing, Maureen steps forward beside Claudia and stops the violence. Claudia suggests that the boys did not want to harm the girls under the gaze of Maureen's green eyes, so they decide the girls aren't worth their time, and walk away.

This scene offers a rare occurrence of female dominance. Frieda stops the altercation based on two factors: First the boy has a crush on Frieda, which, as a male, makes him vulnerable and gives Frieda power (though this dynamic between men and women often changes once a man and woman get married). Secondly, Frieda threatens to reveal that the boy wets the bed. The possession of secrets and the ability to expose them gives power to the female characters of The Bluest Eye (i.e. the power of gossip). The incident is ultimately stopped, though, by Maureen's beauty. Beauty in the novel endows characters with power.

After the altercation, Maureen takes Pecola's arm and introduces herself. When Pecola tells Maureen her name, Maureen responds that 'Pecola' is the name of a character from the film, *Imitation of Life*. Pecola says she doesn't know what that is, so Maureen explains that it is a movie about a mulatto girl who hates her mother because she is black, but cries at her mother's funeral. She explains that she and her mother have seen it four times.

Sharing her fondness for a movie with racist undertones, along with the fact that she has seen it four times with her mother, reveals Maureen's own racist inclinations and their root in her relationship with her mother. Her casual way of talking about the issue suggests she is not fully aware of her own feeling of racial superiority.

Maureen offers to buy Pecola an ice cream at Isaley's. As they walk, Claudia thinks about what flavor she will get, expecting Maureen to buy her an ice cream too. When they reach the ice-cream parlor, Maureen asks Claudia and Frieda if they are going to buy any. Claudia says no, feeling embarrassed that she expected Maureen to buy her an ice-cream or that she even deserved one as much as Pecola.

Claudia's embarrassment at expecting Maureen to buy her ice cream depicts her feeling of inferiority to Maureen. She had thought that Maureen would buy her ice cream because Maureen was rich, and in realizing that Maureen won't it reminds Claudia of her own relative poverty. That Maureen buys an ice cream for Pecola seems like a kindness, but this kindness suggests a paternalistic superiority that Maureen feels toward Pecola. Buying the ice cream reinforced for Maureen her own sense of superiority.

As they finish the walk home, they pass the Dreamland Theater, where they see an image of Betty Grable. Maureen asks the girls if they love Betty Grable as much as she does. Pecola agrees, but Claudia says that Hedy Lemarr is better. Maureen agrees with Claudia, and tells them about a black girl named Audrey who went to the beauty parlor and asked the hairdresser to fix her hair like Hedy Lemarr's. Maureen says that the hairdresser told the girl she would as soon as the girl grew hair like Hedy Lemarr, and then laughs.

Maureen and Pecola's fondness for Betty Grable, a blond haired and blue eyed actress, shows their acceptance of and devotion to white beauty standards. Claudia's defiant belief that Hedy Lemarr, a dark haired Austrian actress, is better suggests her resistance to the white beauty standard. Maureen's easy agreement with Claudia suggests that she is naturally resistant to the white beauty standard, but then her story about Audrey demonstrates that in fact her beauty, because she displays traits of white beauty, actually makes her an enforcer of that beauty standard as well as her insensitivity toward those who suffer as the result of racism.

Maureen then tells the girls that Audrey, who is sixteen, doesn't menstruate yet. She then asks the girls if they menstruate yet. Pecola promptly replies that she does, and Maureen says she does too. Pecola asks Maureen why women menstruate, as if she hoped to provide the answer herself, but Maureen quickly says that babies need blood when they are inside of a woman, so if a woman is pregnant she does not menstruate. Maureen then asks Pecola if she has ever seen a man naked. Pecola responds that she has never seen her father naked. Maureen presses the issue, sensing something strange about the way Pecola brought her father into the conversation. Frieda and Claudia tell Maureen to end the conversation, and Claudia remembers seeing her father naked. She feels ashamed at the lack of shame and strange intrigue she felt at the time.

For the girls, their first menstruation signifies their passage into womanhood. The importance of this passage is exhibited in Pecola's eagerness to respond to her own question, as she wants to feel important due to the "knowledge" that being a menstruating woman gives her. Maureen steals that opportunity from Pecola, and yet Maureen (and likely Pecola, too) don't know the actual reason that women menstruate, revealing the girls' innocence. When Pecola brings her father into the conversation, it foreshadows the sexual violence he brings upon her later in the novel. Claudia's shame and intrigue demonstrates the mystery and power of sex and sexuality in their lives.

Maureen continues pushing the issue. "What do I care about her old black daddy?" she says. Claudia responds by asking whom she is calling black. When Maureen says "you", Claudia yells, "You think you are so cute!" and takes a swing at her. When she swings, however, she misses Maureen, hitting Pecola in the face instead. Maureen runs, yelling back that she *is* cute. She then calls the girls "ugly, black e mos", and goes home. After parting ways with Pecola, the girls walk home, pondering Maureen's insults. Claudia realizes that if Maureen is cute, it means that she is not. She wonders what Maureen has that she lacks. She suggests that at that time, she and Frieda could not fully understand the idea of worthlessness. She knows that Maureen is not the enemy, but the thing to fear was the thing that made her beautiful, and others ugly.

Claudia's aggressive response to Maureen shows that, although she is not fully aware, the color of her skin is one of her most tender insecurities. Missing Maureen and hitting Pecola symbolically demonstrates that anger and violence in response to racism is wild and harms more than its intended target, and further establishes Pecola as the most-harmed member of black society. Maureen's racist inclinations are fully revealed by calling the girls, "black e mos". Claudia begins to realize that Maureen's light skin, green eyes, and wealth are part of what makes her beautiful. Likewise, she begins to understand that racism and the white standard of beauty are her true enemies, not any single individual.

When the girls get home, Mr. Henry comes downstairs in his bathrobe and asks if they'd like some ice cream. He gives them a quarter and tells them to go down to Isalay's. The girls go to a store closer to home and return quickly. They go over to the lilac bushes at the edge of the yard. From the bushes, they hear laughter coming from inside the house. Through the window they see Mr. Henry inside with China and Miss Marie, who they refer to as the Maginot Line. Mr. Henry is sucking on China's fingers while Miss Marie gets dressed. The girls are appalled at the sight of the prostitutes in their house. They have heard rumors that make them perceive the women as dangerous. When the prostitutes leave, the girls go inside. Frieda asks Mr. Henry who the women were. He tells her that the prostitutes are members of his bible class. He tells the girls they better not tell their mother. The girls agree, and after he leaves agree between themselves not to tell.

The girls are horrified because of the rumors they have heard about the prostitutes, who engage in illicit sexual acts. Sex is still a mysterious and frightening issue for the girls. The community refers to Miss Marie as the Maginot Line as a joke. The Maginot Line was a system of fortification built by France in WWI that was supposed to be impregnable, but utterly failed. They call her that because she is easily penetrated. Mr. Henry is depicted in a submissive position to China, which exhibits the power these women have over men. As an adult male, Mr. Henry easily convinces the girls not to tell, which permits him to stay in the house and eventually sexually assault Frieda.

CHAPTER 5

An unnamed narrator describes a particular type of black woman. These women come from small southern towns surrounded by natural beauty, where people are gainfully employed. They are beautiful, clean, and sweet smelling. They soften their skin with Jergens lotion, and straighten their hair with Dixie Peach, parting it to one side. These women are educated at land grant colleges, and trained to work for white people. They are often sweet and moral on the outside, but internally they detest the "funkiness" of nature, passion, and human emotions.

Although these women are black, they go to great lengths to cultivate whiteness by softening their skin and straightening their hair. Because being black is associated with dirtiness and immorality, they keep obsessively clean homes and bodies. This denial of their black race, however, has immense negative effects in their lives as later shown.

These women are hyper-conservative when it comes to sex, referring to sex as "nookie" into adulthood. These women do not enjoy sex, and give their bodies to their husbands sparingly. To engage with them sexually, their husbands must "enter them surreptitiously," and during the act these women are more concerned with the curlers in her hair or the sounds their bodies make during sex than their own pleasure. Occasionally, these women will find a connection to another living being—a cat, for example—who will appreciate the effort she puts into the home. These women will spend time during the day with the cat, until their husbands, "the intruder", comes home expecting dinner. Even after having children, the cat remains the primary focus of her affections.

Their obsession with cleanliness prevents these women from developing healthy views about sex and engaging in satisfying relationships with themselves and their partners. Their relationships with their families are hindered by the denial of their race and obsessive cleanliness. When they do develop connections, it is with their cats, which are traditional understood as compulsively clean and emotionally distant animals.

Geraldine is one of these black women. She moved with her husband and her cat to Lorain, Ohio from a southern town. In Lorain, she gives birth to a son she names Louis Junior. Geraldine meets Junior's physical needs, but refuses to coddle him emotionally. She does not talk to him, allow him to cry, kiss, or coo him. As Junior grows up, he notices his mother directs her love toward her cat. He directs his hatred of his mother toward the cat, and is happy when he is able to watch it suffer.

The damaging effects of racial self-denial are demonstrated through Geraldine's relationship with her child. She meets his physical needs, and raises him in a beautiful home, but fails to respond to him emotionally, showing that external appearances do not always represent internal realities. These effects creates cycles of violence, as shown by Junior's sadistic pleasure in watching the cat suffer.

Junior lives next to the playground at Washington Irving School. He considers the playground his own, and the other children envy him for dominating it after school. He hates seeing the playground empty, so he tries to get children to stay after school to play. At first he longs to play king of the hill with black children. He wants to feel their bodies against him as they tumble down the hill, smell their blackness, and curse casually with them, but his mother calls them "niggers" and only allows Junior to play with "colored" children. Geraldine explains to Junior that there is a difference between colored people like himself and "niggers". Geraldine makes Junior wear clothing worn by white children, cuts his hair short to avoid any suggestion of wooly black hair, and puts lotion on his skin to keep it from becoming ashen as a way to distinguish him from other black children.

Geraldine teaches Junior that he is different than other black children. She distinguishes between colored people and "niggers" based on elements beyond skin color, such as dress and behavior that are also modeled on white behavior. Before being subjected to his mother's racial bigotry, Junior desires to play with black children (and to physically connect with people in a way his mother does not touch him), but that changes as he adopts his mother's racist views. Junior feels superior to other black children, but this feeling ultimately leads to loneliness and frustration. And he responds to those feelings by becoming even more hateful and superior, as that is all he has.

One day, Junior sees Pecola walking home through the playground. He has seen her before, always alone and walking with her head down. He thinks nobody plays with her because she is ugly. Junior asks Pecola if she wants to see the kittens he has at home. Pecola agrees and they walk to Junior's house.

Junior's racist views and perception of Pecola as ugly allows him to feel no regret about luring her into his house to harm her.

Once inside, the beauty of Junior's house amazes Pecola. Junior pulls her into another room, and throws his mother's cat at Pecola's face. Junior laughs after the cat scratches Pecola's face and chest. When Pecola tries to leave, Junior gets in the way, telling Pecola she is his prisoner. After he leaves and shuts Pecola in the room, the cat, which is black with blue-green eyes, begins rubbing itself against Pecola's ankles. When Junior stops hearing Pecola crying, he comes back into the room and sees Pecola petting the cat. In a fit of anger, he picks it up by the back legs and begins swinging it around his head. When Pecola tries to intervene, Junior lets go of the cat, which hits the window and slithers down onto the radiator before dying.

The physical beauty of the house contrasts the ugliness of what happens inside, again depicting the way physical appearances do not always reflect inward realities. Junior directs his hatred of his mother toward the cat and Pecola, exemplifying the way that hatred is often misdirected toward those who are weak or vulnerable, and is often directed by men and boys at girls. Pecola is symbolically connected to the cat, which has black fur but the blue eyes she's always desired. Through this connection, the violence committed against the cat mirrors and forebodes the racial violence committed against Pecola.

Immediately after the altercation, Geraldine arrives home and Junior accuses Pecola of killing the cat. Geraldine picks up the cat's body and pulls it toward her face, looking over its back at Pecola. As she stares, she notices Pecola's ragged clothing, and matted hair. She thinks about all of the things that separate children like Pecola from "colored children", how they sleep together, six to a bed with pee mixing together as they wet their bed, and take seats in church that belonged to "colored children". Eventually, she calls Pecola a "nasty little black bitch", and tells her to get out of her house.

Junior blaming Pecola for killing the cat speaks to a larger issue of racism—blame being placed on the hated other. As Geraldine looks at Pecola, she notices the markers that signify Pecola's blackness and ugliness, which separate her from Pecola. Her thoughts depict the false and absurd ideas that uphold racist ideologies, and her true racist nature shines through as she calls Pecola a "black bitch". She never even thinks of investigating her own son, of investigating the hatred that she herself has created (but does not recognize) in her son.

CHAPTER 6

Claudia associates the arrival of spring with the changing nature of the beatings she receives with the newly growing forsythia and lilac branches. The lashings she receives from the switches taken from these plants feel different than the steady straps and firm hairbrushes they are used to in the winter.

The association between spring and the pain of being beaten not only speaks to the punishment Claudia and Frieda receives at home, but in a larger sense, foreshadows the brutal events that will occur in the narrative during the Spring season, including Frieda's sexual assault and Pecola's rape.

After an afternoon of relaxing in a field, splitting milkweed stems, Claudia heads home. When she enters the house, she finds her mother acting strangely. Mrs. MacTeer is singing a song about trains and Arkansas while she compulsively cleans. She still has her hat on and her shoes are dusty. As Claudia watches and listens to her mother's song, she notices her mother absent-mindedly sweeps the porch twice.

Claudia does not yet know that her mother here is reacting to Frieda's assault by Mr. Henry. In her distress, Mrs. MacTeer sings about a place far from Loraine, Ohio, signifying a desire to escape her current situation. Her incessant cleaning suggests she feels her home has been dirtied through the violation of her daughter.

When her mother finishes, Claudia goes to look for Frieda. She finds her upstairs in bed, crying. Claudia asks her what happened, assuming Frieda got a whipping. Frieda tells Claudia that their father beat up Mr. Henry. Claudia immediately thinks that their father found out about the prostitutes they'd seen Mr. Henry with, but Frieda tells her that Mr. Henry touched her breasts. Upon hearing this, Claudia asks how it felt, mistakenly assuming that this kind of sexual interaction should feel good. Frieda tells her she felt nothing.

Mr. Henry, an adult male character, forces Frieda into womanhood. This passage foretells the sexual violence and oppression experienced by the female characters of The Bluest Eye. Claudia's assumption that sexual interaction always feels good suggests an innocence that Frieda no longer has. Yet Frieda's response to sex, now that she has been assaulted, is that it feels like nothing. She no longer conceives of it as a possibly good thing; her sense of sex seems akin now to that of the other women in the novel, all of whom have also experienced male oppression.

Claudia continues prying for information about the incident. She asks if Frieda just sat there and let Mr. Henry touch her. She looks at her own undeveloped chest and comments that she doesn't have anything to touch, and never would. Frieda accuses her of being jealous, but Claudia tells her that she is just sick of getting everything last. She then asks what happened in the garden. Frieda tells her that they waited for Mr. Henry, and when he returned, their father threw a tricycle at Mr. Henry's head and knocked him off the porch, and then Mrs. MacTeer hit him with a broom. Then Mr. Buford brought his gun to the scene, and Mr. MacTeer shot at Mr. Henry as he ran away. After Mr. Henry ran, Rosemary came from her house and told Frieda that her father was going to jail, so Frieda hit her.

By asking Frieda if she just sat there, Claudia displays her ignorance of the realities of male oppression of women. Her jealousy shows her inability to conceptualize the trauma incurred during such an experience. Their father's reaction, while violent, demonstrates the love he has for his family, which is contrasted later when Cholly rapes Pecola, simultaneously failing to protect her and acting as the aggressor. Frieda likewise demonstrates her love for her father by hitting Rosemary. Love in the Bluest Eye is often paired with violence.

Claudia asks Frieda if their mother whipped her after the incident. When Frieda tells her that their mother didn't whip her, Claudia asks what she was crying for. Frieda tells Claudia that after the incident, Miss Dunion come to the house and told Mrs. MacTeer to take Frieda to the doctor to make sure she isn't "ruined". Frieda explains she is crying because she doesn't want to be "ruined" like the prostitutes they'd seen with Mr. Henry. The girls assume ruined means that Frieda will become fat, with thin legs and an ugly face. Claudia attempts to assuage Frieda's fear by telling her that China and Poland are ruined, but they aren't fat. Frieda replies by telling Claudia they aren't fat because they drink whiskey. Based on this logic, the girls decide that Frieda should drink whiskey to avoid getting fat and becoming "ruined", so they go to Pecola's house because they know her father will have whiskey and believe Pecola can acquire it for them.

The girls misunderstanding of what their parents mean by the word "ruined" speaks to their naiveté with regard to sexual matters. They associate being "ruined" with the prostitutes, as they sense it has something to do with distasteful sexual interactions like the one Frieda experienced, and assume because Miss Marie is fat, she must be ruined. They realize the other prostitutes are not fat, and based on their mother's gossip about the prostitutes believe the reason for this is because they drink whiskey. This chain of faulty reasoning leads to their decision to procure whiskey for Frieda.

Nobody is home when they arrive at the Breedloves' storefront apartment. As they walk around the side of the building to try the side door, they encounter The Maginot Line (Miss Marie) sitting on the second-story porch drinking root beer. The girls look up at her, noticing her massive legs and puffy feet. She looks down at the girls and belches. The girls imagine they are witnessing what will happen to Frieda. When The Maginot Line asks if the girls are looking for someone, Claudia explains they are looking for Pecola. The Maginot Line tells them Pecola is at her mother's workplace, explaining that Mrs. Breedlove works at a house by the lake. She offers to let the girls wait with her for Pecola to return, but Claudia tells her that they are not allowed to because the Maginot Line is "ruined". In response, The Maginot Line throws glass bottle at the girls and laughs at them as they run away.

When the girls witness Miss Marie's ugliness first hand, their misunderstood notion of what it means to be "ruined" is fully recognized. Miss Marie is insulted when Claudia tells her she is "ruined." As a mature women, she has a different understanding of the word from that of the innocent girls, which makes it more painful and triggers her violent reaction. Yet at the same time the girls sense is also the communities sense of the prostitutes. It may be, though, that such an accusation coming from girls she thought might be innocent only makes the accusation more painful for Miss Marie.

Deciding that Frieda's situation is dire enough, they begin walking to Mrs. Breedlove's workplace, even though their mother might beat them for it. As they approach the house where Mrs. Breedlove works, the girls notice the houses become sturdier, and edged with shrubbery and flowers. They find that the lakeside houses are the most beautiful, with large grassy yards stretching back to Lake Erie. Just before reaching the house, they pass a park where black children are not allowed to play.

The girls enter a wealthy, white neighborhood with beautiful homes. The houses are sturdier, literally because they are better constructed than the houses in the black section of town, and symbolically as the families that live in them are more stable than the black families in the story. For the girls, the beauty of the homes likewise signifies their worth and the worth of the people who live in them. The playground for whites only lets the girls know that they are in a place where they are not welcomed based purely on the color of their skin.

Claudia and Frieda find Pecola sitting on the stoop in front of a beautiful white house. They tell her about their interaction with The Maginot Line, claiming that she tried to kill them. Pecola, who calls the Maginot line by her true name, Miss Marie, explains that she is not dangerous. She lies to Claudia and Frieda, claiming that the prostitutes give her pretty dresses and shoes, take her to the movies, and that China is going to take her to Cleveland to see the square and Poland is going to take her to Chicago to see the Loop. Pecola defends herself when Frieda tells her to stop lying.

Pecola's lies demonstrate the insecurity she feels about herself, and her self-perceived ugliness. The lies about traveling with the prostitutes points to her desire to escape her abusive home and see the world.

When Mrs. Breedlove finds the girls on the back porch, she tells them to come inside while she finishes up the wash. The girls are stunned by the beautiful interior of the house. They notice Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowing in the house's white porcelain, white woodwork, polished cabinets and copperware.

The white family's home stands in stark contrast to the home the Breedloves live in. Mrs. Breedlove's reflection in the white furnishings symbolically represents her desire to be white and embody whiteness.

After Mrs. Breedlove leaves the room to finish the wash, the family's little white girl walks into the room. When she sees Pecola, Frieda and Claudia, a look of fear dances across her face. After a moment, the little girl asks where Polly is. Claudia is insulted that the little white girl calls Mrs. Breedlove by her first name, and has the urge to scratch her.

The fear in the little white girl's eyes suggests she has been taught to fear black people. Even as an adult, Mrs. Breedlove is inferior to the little white girl, as shown when the little girl calls her by the nickname "Polly." At the same time, that willingness to interact with the little girl based on a nickname may suggest that Mrs. Breedlove shares a level of love for the young girl that she withholds from her own daughter, who is not allowed to call her mother by a nickname. Claudia's response reveals the injustice she feels with regard to the little girl's gesture, and the violent tendencies such feelings inspire.

As the little girl yells out for Mrs. Breedlove to come into the kitchen, Frieda notices a dish of berry cobbler on the stove. Pecola reaches out and touches the dish, accidently knocking it onto the floor. The hot cobbler splashes onto Pecola's legs, causing her to jump around in pain. Just then, Mrs. Breedlove enters the room with a basket of laundry in hand. She jumps toward Pecola, slapping her to the ground with the back of her hand. She immediately yanks her up from the floor and slaps her again, yelling at Pecola for messing up "her" floor. Mrs. Breedlove then notices the little white girl is crying. She goes over to her and begins hushing her, promising she will make the girl another cobbler.

By referring to the floor as hers, Mrs. Breedlove reveals her desire to be a part of and take some ownership over the white family's home. Her differing reactions to Pecola and the little white girl further this idea. She slaps Pecola twice, even though the cobbler has burned her legs, demonstrating her disdain for her own child. She reacts to the little white girl by soothing her, by promising to replace the cobbler, which shows both her own servitude and her preference for the white child over her own daughter.

CHAPTER 7

An unnamed narrator tells about Mrs. Breedlove's childhood. Mrs. Breedlove grew up in Alabama in a house seven miles from the nearest road. She grows up as Pauline Williams, one of eleven children. At two years of age, Pauline impales her foot on a rusty nail, which leaves the foot disabled and causes it to flop around when she walks. She blames her life's misfortune on the disabled foot, believing her family ignores her because of it and blaming it for her general sense of separateness and unworthiness. Isolated from her family and the world, she takes pleasure in arranging things—jars, peach pits, sticks, stones, and pinecones. When people accidently scatter her rows, she is happy to reset them.

Pauline's self-perceived sense of ugliness begins with her disabled foot, which leads to a sense of separation form her family and feeling of worthlessness, showing the damaging effects of self-perceived ugliness. The rusty nail that penetrates her foot, leading to her deformity, can also be seen as symbolically foreshadowing Cholly's penetration of Pecola, which ultimately destroys her. Mrs. Breedlove's fondness for order as a child foretells her adult proclivity for cleanliness, which signifies her desire for whiteness.

Near the beginning of World War I, Pauline's family migrates north to Kentucky with a number of other families to find employment in the mines and mills. Pauline remembers the June bugs in the trees on the night her family left Alabama. That night was the last time she saw real June bugs. There were no real June bugs in Kentucky like there were in Alabama, and the people called them fireflies instead.

Pauline's family leaves their home in Alabama in search of better employment because of difficult economic circumstances. The lack of real June bugs and colloquial differences in the north make her feel far from home, further her sense of isolation.

In Kentucky, the family lives in a real town. After two of her brothers join the military, one sister dies, and two others get married, the house feels spacious and luxurious compared to the one they'd moved from in Alabama. Pauline begins to care for the house and two younger siblings, Chicken and Pie, after her mother gets a job serving a white minister. Just as she enjoyed arranging things as a young girl, she enjoys taking care of the house after her parents and siblings leave for work and school each day.

Pauline finds a sense of purpose in caring for the home and family, and is able to engage in her childhood passion for arranging things. Pauline takes on the role of a mature woman by caring for the house, although she is still an adolescent. Her mother's job serving a white minister shows that race and class standards exist in the North as they do in the South.

When she turns fifteen, Pauline loses her passion she once felt for her duties around the house. She becomes restless and begins fantasizing about men and love, which takes her focus away from her work. She grows melancholy, with the changing seasons. At church she experiences powerful fantasies. She tries to stay focused on the dangers of sinning, but the gospel songs cause her to dream about redemption, salvation, and rebirth, achieved without any effort on her part. In her fantasies, she is usually sitting by a riverbank, or gathering berries, when a Presence appears. The Presence has no face, voice, or form, but in it's presence her foot is healed and the Presence takes her away forever.

Pauline is changed by her desire for sexual intimacy, drawing her away from the housework she once enjoyed. Pauline's fantasizes about a figure, a god or a man, who will heal her disabled foot and allow her to escape her ugliness and worthlessness, indicates both her own innocence at the time but also the sense among women that their own identities and futures are entirely dependent on having a relationship with a man.

When a man finally arrives in her life, she is grateful, but not surprised. The man, later revealed to be Cholly, approaches Pauline on the hottest day of the year, with yellow eyes and flaring nostrils. He approaches her from behind, and begins tickling her disabled foot and kissing her leg. Pauline's first interaction with Cholly reminds her of colors she saw as a child. She remembers the purple stains left on her dress by mashed berries, her mother's yellow lemonade, and the green streaks of the June bugs.

Cholly is depicted in a threatening almost demonic way, but Pauline's fantasy of a man coming to redeem her allows her to fall for Cholly nonetheless. Cholly is drawn by Pauline's disabled foot, which signifies her weakness. This action foreshadows Cholly's tendency to prey on and oppress the weak (though this view will be complicated by the next chapter, which focuses on Cholly). Pauline associates Cholly's presence with colors that remind her of her home in the South. The image of mashed berries on her dress symbolically suggests Pauline's passage into womanhood, connecting to the blood on Pecola's dress during her first menstruation.

At first, Pauline and Cholly love each other. Cholly finds Pauline's simple country ways and naivety toward life in the city endearing. Instead of ignoring her disabled foot, he treats it as if it makes Pauline special. Pauline enjoys Cholly's liveliness and tendency toward laughter. After getting married, they decide to go further north to Loraine, Ohio.

Pauline's fantasies about a man saving her blind her to the fact that Cholly might not be the best man for her. His attention to her disability allows her to feel special, and like many women in the novel, her sense of worth becomes defined by the man in her life.

In Loraine, Pauline begins to miss "her people". She has never lived around so many white people. In the south, she did not come in contact with many white people, and the ones that she did encounter were hostile. She is surprised that the black people living in the north are different than in the south. They are just as mean as the white folks she encounters.

The nature of racism is different in the North. At home in the South, the communities were strongly segregated, and whites were overtly aggressive toward blacks. While awful, this has the effect of binding all the black people together in a kind of equal status and community. In the North, the whites and blacks are more integrated and racism is less overt and aggressive but still exists (as the novel has portrayed). As a result, outside pressure of white violence and aggression does not bind the black community together and blacks can begin to identify the differences among themselves (based on the standards of white culture that they have adopted) and racism develops among and between black 's themselves and black community, while freer, also becomes more cruel.

In her loneliness, Pauline becomes more dependent on Cholly. He begins to resent her for clinging to him, and spending more and more time out of the house with his friends. Pauline meets a few black women, but feels uncomfortable around them. These women are amused by her "country ways" and the fact that she doesn't straighten her hair or do her makeup correctly. Pauline begins to desire new clothes, as she believes a new wardrobe will help her fit in. When she and Cholly begin to fight over her asking for money, she begins taking jobs as a day worker. The extra income helps her buy new clothes, but Cholly gets angry with her for spending the money. Money becomes the focus of all their arguments, Cholly growing angry with Pauline for buying clothes, and Pauline with Cholly for spending his money on alcohol.

Cholly wants a woman for his own purposes; not someone who needs him all the time. Not someone who impinges on his own desire to do whatever he wants. Their relationship becomes even more strained once Pauline is introduced to the white standard of beauty. Her friends, who are already dedicated to the standard, make fun of her appearance, which causes Pauline to believe she would be accepted if she talked, dressed, and straightened her hair like them. Pauline strives for this unattainable white beauty standard by spending money on items that signify whiteness. Meanwhile, Cholly wants that money to use to escape his demons and sadness in another way: through alcohol.

Eventually, Pauline gets a steady job working for a white family. The woman she works for is mean and simple minded, and Pauline is astonished by the family's inability to get along with one another. She wonders why, with all the money and the beautiful house they own, they can't enjoy one another's company. She also struck by how dirty the family is as she cleans their house and clothing. One day Cholly goes to the house and demands money. Both Pauline and Cholly leave after the woman threatens to call the police. When Pauline attempts to get the job back, the woman tells her she will only take her back if she leaves Cholly. Pauline refuses, thinking it would be wrong for a black woman to leave a black man because a white woman demanded it. Pauline asks the woman for a loan so she can pay the gas man so she can cook. The woman refuses unless Pauline leaves Cholly. She explains that she is only thinking of Pauline's future, that Cholly is no good for Pauline because he doesn't take care of her. Pauline thinks that if the woman really cared about her future, she would lend her money to cook with, and refuses again.

The white family's unhappy home life shows that even though they fit the ideal on the outside, being white and rich, they are still unhappy. Pauline's view of whiteness as the ideal, however, is not changed by what she witnesses. The interaction between Pauline and the white woman captures a lot of the trickiness of racism and its complicated effects on communities. The white woman's sense that Pauline should leave Cholly is almost certainly correct. But the white woman does not make it as a suggestion; she demands it, and she links that demand to Pauline's own survival by refusing to giver he any money if she doesn't leave Cholly. The white woman is acting both patronizing and dictatorially, and Pauline has enough pride to not bow to such pressure. Had the white woman advised Pauline in the spirit of friendship, without demand and with generosity, the outcome might have been different. But, of course, the white woman's implied racism and sense of superiority would never allow her to even think of acting in such a way.

One winter, Pauline discovers she is pregnant. Cholly is delighted by the news and begins drinking less and coming home more often. After leaving her job, and spending her days in their two-room apartment, Pauline continues to be lonely and depressed. She begins going to the movies to pass the time. The movies she watches rekindle her adolescent dreams of love, but more importantly, introduce her to ideas of physical beauty. These ideas become dangerous as Pauline begins to equate physical beauty with virtue, and develops self-contempt because she doesn't fit the images of beauty on the movie screen. Her ideas of love also become distorted as she watches the fictional relationships in the movies. Finally, her desire to access the world of the white movie stars makes it difficult to go home to her apartment and Cholly.

Cholly's behavior changes when he realizes he is going to have a family, showing the redeeming nature of home and family. Pauline's pregnancy forces her to leave her job, making her dependent on Cholly once again, which makes her depressed. The movies heighten her obsession with whiteness as the ideal of beauty and romance. The beautiful white actresses contrast her physical appearance, leading to self-contempt; their fictional love lives distort her views and lead her to hate her own marriage; and their beautiful homes make her resent her little apartment. The white standards of beauty make her hate everything about her own life, and about herself.

One day at the movies, Pauline is watching Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. She has done her hair like Jean Harlow's, and imagines she looks like her. After biting into a piece of candy, her front tooth falls out. Things change for Pauline after losing her tooth. She no longer does her hair, and just accepts that she is ugly. Cholly pokes fun at Pauline's missing tooth, and they begin fighting the way they did before she'd found out she was pregnant.

Losing her tooth symbolically represents the loss of her dreams of attaining whiteness and her acceptance of ugliness. The (white) tooth leaves an empty dark space in its wake, which can be equated to the emptiness Pauline feels as a black woman. Pauline's acceptance of ugliness and Cholly's insults have a devastating effect on her relationship with Cholly.

Pauline gives birth to a baby boy, Samuel, but discovering the first baby did not fill the emptiness she feels, she gets pregnant again. She talks to the second baby in her womb, promising to love it no matter what it looks like. She decides to give birth to this baby in the hospital. While she is in labor, the doctor brings a group of medical students into Pauline's room. He tells the students that black women like Pauline have no trouble giving birth. He says they give birth right away without any pain, just like horses. The students don't acknowledge her while they examine her body.

Pauline's emptiness comes from her longing for whiteness, so the birth of her black child was unsuccessful in fulfilling her desire. Realizing this, she decides to think about her second child differently, although the force of her desire for whiteness leaves her unable to live up to this promise. The doctors' interaction with Pauline demonstrates the shocking dehumanizing effect of racism and specifically the damage such racism inflicts on black women.

When Pecola is born, Pauline is surprised because she doesn't look the way she had imagined her during the pregnancy as she talked to the baby her stomach. She is happy to have her newborn baby, but she knows Pecola is ugly.

Pauline's obsession with white beauty leads her to imagine the ideal child. This ideal, however, is unattainable, and distorts her views of her own child, allowing her to believe Pecola, her own newborn baby, is ugly. Pecola's conviction about her own ugliness now makes more sense—any baby brought up by a mother who thinks it is ugly is bound to come to that same conclusion about itself. So Pauline's sense of her own ugliness is passed on to Pecola—it's a vicious cycle.

Pauline finds a new sense of purpose in becoming a mother. She no longer has time for dreams and movies. She takes on the full responsibility as the family breadwinner and goes back to church. Pauline takes on the role of a martyr during this time. She enables Cholly's immoral activities, which allows her to feel morally superior, "[bearing] him like a crown of thorns, and her children like a cross."

Pauline's taking on the role of a family martyr who sacrifices herself for those she loves gives her a sense of purpose and a sense of superiority, which helps to maintain her, but with serious negative consequences, as she comes to see and treat both Cholly and her children as burdens she must bear, and neither Cholly nor her children will benefit from, or like, being treated that way.

Eventually, Pauline finds a steady job working for a wealthy white family. She enjoys the work, as it fulfills her childhood need to arrange things, her disabled foot doesn't make any sound on the carpets, and the cupboards are full of food. Most importantly, they give her the nickname she'd been denied as a child—Polly. She begins to care for the home's children as if they were her own, taking pleasure in bathing them in a tub with endless hot water and brushing their straight blond hair. During this time, however, she begins to neglect her own home and family, and becomes increasingly harsh with them, beating the desire to run away into her son, Samuel, and the fear of growing up into Pecola.

Working for the white family allows Pauline to finally feel like she is part of the world of white people. She is blind to the fact that her nickname marks her as pejorative or inferior. Instead, it makes her feel a part of the family. She especially enjoys taking care of the white children, paying close attention to the signifiers of their whiteness—their white skin and blond hair—but her devotion to the white family makes her resent her own home and family, showing the negative outcomes of a black woman striving to access the white world.

Pauline and Cholly's marriage grows increasingly worse. She continues using her Christian virtue to feel superior to him, and speaks badly about him to Pecola and Samuel. She describes the way they used to make love. In the early days of their relationship, he would come home and make love to her, during which she would feel deep affection for him. She would feel colors rising up in her. These sexual encounters gave Pauline a sense of power, youth, and beauty. Later in their relationship, however, Cholly comes home drunk and begins "thrashing away inside of [her]" before she even wakes up. She claims not to care because God will take care of her, but she misses the rainbow of colors she used to experience.

Unable to overpower Cholly physically, Pauline uses gossip and her Christian virtue to overpower him. Sex can be a redeeming factor in a woman's life, and for Pauline it once gave her a sense of beauty and a feeling of power in the relationship. The colors she used to experience during the act connect love making with a feeling of being at home in the South. But as her relationship with Cholly sours, sex becomes an oppressive force in Pauline's life. In her powerlessness she turns to God, but misses the sense of home she used to experience.

CHAPTER 8

An unnamed narrator details Cholly's childhood. At four days old, Cholly's mother abandons him on a junk heap. His Great Aunt Jimmy rescues him, and later beats his mother with a razor strap. Afterward, Cholly's mother runs away. Aunt Jimmy takes delight in telling Cholly that she rescued him, and besides the fact that she makes him sleep in the same bed with her in the winter where he sees her wrinkled breasts, he is grateful that she saved him.

This chapter allows the reader to understand what caused Cholly's dysfunction. Cholly has never had a sense of home and family, which sheds light on his inability to be a father. Even after Aunt Jimmy rescues him, he lives in a dysfunctional situation, where he lacks a father figure and is forced to sleep in the same bed as his aunt.

After four years of school, Cholly gets the courage to ask Aunt Jimmy what his father's name was. She tells him his father's name is Samson Fuller, and she thinks he ran off to Macon, Georgia. Cholly asks why he wasn't named after his father. Aunt Jimmy explains that his father was never around and his mother didn't give him a name, so she named him Charles Fuller after her deceased brother, who was a good man.

Cholly longs for a sense of home and family, which provokes his desire to know his father's name. Aunt Jimmy attempts to change Cholly's future by naming him after her brother, a moral man, and severing his connection to his father. Cholly, however, later names his own son Samuel, which is closely connected to his father's name, Samson, symbolically continuing the legacy of dysfunction in the family.

Two years later, Cholly quits school and takes a job at Tyson's Feed and Grain Store. At work he meets a man named Blue Jack. Cholly loves Blue Jack and enjoys Blue Jack's stories about what it was like during the Emancipation Proclamation. They also talk about the women Blue Jack has slept with, the fights he'd been in as a young man, and how he once talked his way out of getting lynched, while others hadn't.

Blue Jack becomes a father figure to Cholly. His stories about sex, violence, and racism are formative in the way Cholly matures into a man. The story about lynching demonstrates the dangers of being a black man, and shapes the way Cholly perceives his place in the world.

One July 4th, Cholly and Blue Jack are at a church picnic. The father of one of the families lifts a watermelon over his head, preparing to smash it on the ground. As Cholly watches, the man lifts the watermelon over his head. To Cholly his arms look taller than trees, and his hands look bigger than the sun. For a moment, Cholly wonders if God looks like the man with the watermelon, but he quickly realizes that God is an old white man, with a white beard and blue eyes. He realizes if the man does not look like God, he must look like the devil. Cholly decides that if the man looks like the devil, he prefers the devil to God. When the man smashes the watermelon, the watermelon's heart spills out. The man gives Blue Jack the heart and he shares it with Cholly.

Cholly associates God with whiteness, which furthers the theme of whiteness meaning virtue, cleanliness, and beauty. Yet by this logic, the black man must resemble the devil. This realization has a devastating effect on Cholly as a young black boy. Because he is black, he feels he can never attain the goodness of God, and therefor embraces his resemblance to the devil, and discards the desire to strive for goodness. By sharing the watermelon heart with Cholly, Blue Jack demonstrates his role as a father figure but the eating of the melon for Cholly becomes a kind of satanic ritual, an embrace of hating the white world.

During a very chilly Spring, Aunt Jimmy gets sick. Her friends pray for her and read the bible to her, but she still doesn't recover. Eventually, they decide to fetch a local medicine woman named M'Dear. Cholly is surprised when he sees M'Dear. He expected a decrepit old woman, but M'Dear stands six feet tall, and has four white knots of hair that give off a sense of power and authority. After running her fingers through Aunt Jimmy's hair and over her body, she asks to see the slop jar to examine Aunt Jimmy's stools. She instructs them to bury the jar, and tells Aunt Jimmy to drink only pot liquor.

M'Dear is one of few women in the novel with power. Her power comes not only through her physical size and appearance, but because she is independent and serves a necessary role in the community. She possesses knowledge that others in the community, including men, don't have access to.

Over the next few days, Aunt Jimmy drinks only pot liquor and improves. Her friends spend time with her, and Cholly listens to them as they talk nostalgically about the pain they have endured during their lives. These women, now elderly, have reconceptualized their experience in their own minds. In their understanding, instead of laboring in white homes, they ran the homes, and while they beat their children with one hand they took care of them with the other. As elderly women, they are beyond the lust of men, and therefor spared the dangers faced by younger women—they are "finally free".

The novel's black women only experience freedom from male oppression once they are no longer desired as sexual objects. By re-conceptualizing their experience, by re-telling their own stories, they come to fashion and understand the power they have always possessed as black women, caring for homes and raising children. Realizing this only after they are elderly, however, they are bitter because they have endured oppression their entire lives, never realizing their worth as young black women.

On a wet Saturday night a few days after M'Dear's visit, Aunt Jimmy eats peach cobbler, breaking the diet M'Dear prescribed to her. That night she dies. During the days after her death, Cholly does not immediately grieve her death. He receives a great deal of attention, food, a hot bath, and clean clothes. Before the funeral, Aunt Jimmy's family talks about how they will afford to bury her, and later decide that Cholly will go stay with Aunt Jimmy's brother.

The attention Cholly receives from his extended family prevents him from feeling the immediate gravity of his loss, although this loss will later have severe consequences. The discussion of burial costs demonstrates the financial instability of the family, but her brother's decision to take Cholly in demonstrates a sense of family still exists.

After the funeral, Aunt Jimmy's family and friends gather at her house. Cholly finds his cousin, Jake, outside of the house. Jake offer's Cholly a rolled cigarette, but when Cholly is unable to light it, he throws it on the ground. Ashamed, he feels he needs to prove himself, so when Jake asks if there are any girls around, Cholly says yes and leads Jake to where the girls are. The boys take a spot on the porch beside a group of girls and listen to them talk. The girls begin to bicker with one another as they react to the boys' presence.

Even from a young age, Cholly understands that women are a means to gain power and prove his masculinity. The way the girls' conversation changes in the presence of the boys demonstrates the power of male presence over women; the excitement of love and allure of sex. The girls begin bickering with one another, demonstrating the way that oppression turns the oppressed against one another.

Jake eventually persuades a girl named, Suky, to walk around with him. After Suky agrees, Cholly turns to another girl, Darlene, and tells her to come along. They walk to a wild vineyard, and eat muscadine berries. The boys begin chasing the girls, pelting them with grapes. During the chase, Darlene and Cholly slip into a gully, and when they pause to rest, they notice Jake and Suky are gone. Darlene grows concerned because her dress is stained and her mother is going to hit her when she gets back. Cholly realizes then that Aunt Jimmy is dead, and he misses the fear of being whipped.

Jake persuades Suky to follow him, while Cholly tells Darlene, as opposed to asking her, to follow, showing the power males have over females. Although pelting the girls with grapes is playful, the role of males as the aggressor and females as the victim is alluded to in this scene. Cholly's realization that he will miss Aunt Jimmy's beatings suggests his realization that the threat of those whippings kept him in line, kept him from tipping over the edge into something terrible. He recognizes, and fears, where he is going now that he is cut free of family.

Cholly feels sorry for Darlene and tries to help her tie the bow on her dress. As he ties the bow, Darlene slips her hands under his shirt and begins tickling him. Eventually they begin to have sex. During the act, however, Darlene suddenly stops moving and cries out. Cholly thinks he has hurt her, but quickly realizes that two white men with guns and a flashlight are watching them. The men force Cholly to continue having sex with Darlene. As he continues the sex act, the men humiliate him, shining the flashlight on his behind, and attacking him with racial slurs. Feeling powerless under their gaze, Cholly directs his hatred toward Darlene. Eventually, the white men hear their hunting dogs barking, and walk away.

Cholly's compassion and attempt to help Darlene shows that, at this time, he still possesses the capacity to be tender with women. Darlene makes the first move, indicating that the sexual interaction was consensual at first, and Cholly's concern when Darlene cries out further depicts his tenderness. The introduction of racial violence and oppression, however, immediately strips Cholly's ability to be gentle, showing the way that white oppression distorts black lives and leads to misplaced hatred.

Over the next few days, Cholly doesn't go far from the house, for fear of seeing Darlene. He continues to cultivate his hatred for her, never considering directing the hatred toward the white men as, subconsciously, he knows hatred toward the men he was powerless over would consume him because it would be a hatred he could do nothing about. One day while sitting on the back porch, Cholly develops the irrational belief that Darlene might be pregnant. He decides to run away and find his father. He knows that leaving Darlene is wrong, but in that moment he believes he knows how his father felt when he left. Cholly takes the money Aunt Jimmy had left in the stove flue and departs toward Macon, Georgia, to find his father.

Cholly knows that as a black man he is powerless over the white men who humiliated him. Hatred against them would consume him because there is nothing he could do with it. So he directs his hatred toward Darlene because as a male he has power over her, demonstrating a chain of oppression unfolding—the oppressed turn toward those who are weaker than them and become the oppressors. Cholly then follows in his father's footsteps by running, showing the way that familial dysfunction passes down generationally. He believes his father, who made the same decision, will understand why he ran from Darlene.

Cholly works odd jobs as he makes his way toward Macon until he's saved enough money to buy a bus ticket that would bring him the rest of the way. When he arrives in Macon, he finds a group of men gambling in an alley. Cholly is excited by the commotion in the alley and sight of the money being gambled away. He asks one of the men if he knows where to find Samson Fuller. The man points to Cholly's father, who is arguing with another man. Cholly is surprised that he is taller than his father, as he'd imagined his father would be a large man. When Cholly approaches, Samson turns and stares at Cholly. He asks Cholly who sent him. When Cholly can't remember his mother's name, he says nobody sent him, and tells Samson his name. Samson, having left before knowing Cholly's name does not recognize him. As Cholly walks away, Samson tells him to, "Tell that bitch she get her money."

Cholly finds his father gambling, drinking, and arguing with another man in an alleyway, which foreshadows Cholly's own bleak future. His excitement shows his attraction to that lifestyle. Cholly's idealized image of his father as a large, strong man, in whom he will be able to confide, is smashed upon meeting his father. Samson's lack of compassion and complete lack of recognition for his son, and likewise, Cholly's inability to remember his mother's name, shows the deep absence of family in these men's' lives. Samson's final comment depicts the way he imagines the women in his life—as freeloaders attempting to take his money.

In shock after the incident with his father, Cholly exits the alleyway and his legs give way. He takes a seat on a crate turned over on the sidewalk. Cholly exerts all of his energy to abstain from crying, but in the process, defecates in his pants. He runs to the pier and passes out in the shade beneath it in the fetal position. When he wakes up, it is dark and he begins washing his clothes in the river. He thinks of Aunt Jimmy as he cleans his clothes. Suddenly a longing for her company overtakes him and he begins to cry.

In attempting to retain his masculinity by not bursting into tears, Cholly defecates in his pants. In this moment, he metaphorically regresses into infancy, which is furthered by laying in the fetal position under the pier. This scene shows that even though Cholly goes to great lengths to prove his strength and masculinity, he is still a child. Eventually, he does cry, showing the pain he feels, not only over the loss of Aunt Jimmy, but at the loss of his dream of having any form of familial connection.

After this experience, Cholly finds himself dangerously free. He is free to sleep in doorways, sleep with women, beat them, and take care of them when he chooses. He is free to go to jail and not care, free enough to kill three white men, and free to drink himself silly. He doesn't care how long he lives or how he dies. When he meets Pauline, he is drawn to her by the joy he awakens in her. After he marries her, the repetitiveness of the married life makes Cholly desperate and uninspired. Alcohol becomes Cholly's only interest. He is dumbfounded about how to act once his children are born due to his own lack of a male role model growing up. He reacts to them based on what he is feeling in the moment.

As a black man unable to feel true freedom, his freedom comes at the expense of his concern for his life or the lives of others, which makes it a dangerous freedom. The happiness he brings to Pauline stops his dangerous behavior for a short time, but eventually his addiction to his "dangerous freedom" makes him comes to view marriage as another repressive force in his life, which makes him depressed and desperate for his old sense of freedom. His relationship with his children is marred by his own lack of family, and his old ways of acting and reacting based solely on his feelings (a very juvenile way of acting, unsurprising considering he has had no real adults in much of his life) has a devastating effect on his children.

On a Saturday afternoon, Cholly staggers home drunk. He finds Pecola at the sink washing dishes. As he watches her he experiences a fury of passing emotions—revulsion, guilt, pity, then love. He is revolted by her helplessness, then guilty because he knows he cannot take care of her. He can't understand how Pecola could love him, and in that moment he feels a deep hatred for her. As he watches, feeling a sickening hatred for his daughter, Pecola lifts her leg and scratches her calf with her toes. This gesture reminds him of the day he met Pauline in Kentucky. He is filled with tenderness for his daughter and desires to cover her foot and nibble her calf. Cholly drops to his knees and crawls toward Pecola. He begins nibbling her calf, and then pulls her to the floor and rapes her. As he finishes the sexual act, "His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her." As he stands up, he looks at his daughter and feels a mixture of hatred and tenderness. The hatred prevents him from picking her up, so he covers her with a blanket and leaves her on the floor.

Depicting the rape through Cholly's perspective allows the reader to see how the damage of racism and racial self-hatred could allow this horrible act to occur within a family. Leaving Pecola's perspective out of the rape scene also demonstrates the silencing effect of oppression in women's lives. The fury of emotions reflects the damage that Cholly has accumulated in his life. The revulsion and guilt at Pecola's helplessness mirrors his first sexual experience with Darlene. His inability to feel loved suggests a deep self-hatred. The tenderness shows a longing to access the love he felt at first for Pauline. When he ejaculates, Cholly's self-hatred literally enters Pecola as she bears his child, the symbol of his ugliness and hatred, and metaphorically as she will carry the burden of this traumatic experience, which leads to her own self-hatred and self-perceived ugliness.

CHAPTER 9

An unnamed narrator introduces Soaphead Church, a self proclaimed "misanthrope", who hates people and find's the human body ugly and filthy. The closest he gets to human relationships is by collecting the items they have touched, used, and thrown away. In the community, Soaphead Church is a failed preacher turned caseworker, declaring himself a "reader, adviser, and interpreter of dreams." He enjoys the job because it allows him to witness human stupidity and build a sense of his own meticulous self-righteousness by witnessing human decay. His life is strictly regimented, balanced, and tightly structured, but his stability is thrown off by his sexual desire. Because he hates the human body with such passion, he directs his sexual desires toward children, as he finds their bodies the less offensive than those of adults.

Like Geraldine, Soaphead Church is another example of how obsession with whiteness destroys black lives. He is obsessed with cleanliness and discipline, which are indicators of whiteness. This obsession leads to perverted sexual desires for children, and a feeling of superiority, which results in isolation from the community.

Soaphead Church is a cinnamon-eyed West Indian man with light brown skin. His family is proud of their academic accomplishments and white heritage. A British Nobleman introduced the "white strain" into Soaphead Church's family in the early 1800's, leaving the child and his mother with a small sum of money before abandoning them. The child becomes a man who is obsessed with his white heritage and instills this obsession in his progeny. With the feeling of superiority that stems from their white ancestry, the family members do well in school. They go into medicine, law, and theology, gaining prestigious positions, but abusing their power to exploit "the less gifted" in the process. Members of the family are encouraged to marry others with light skin, and those who cannot find a light skinned partner marry within the family.

Soaphead Church's obsession with whiteness begins with his family. The family has constructed their identity based on their white heritage. The "white strain" becomes their most important asset, as it allows them limited access to the white world. This obsession, however, leads to a hatred of their black ancestry, self-hatred, and even incestuous marriages to preserve the white heritage. Education becomes another defining characteristic of the family's whiteness, and through education they are able to attain positions of power. These positions of power, however, allow the family to continue the legacy of racial oppression.

Soaphead Church was born as Elihue Micah Whitcomb, the son of a schoolmaster and a half-Chinese mother who died shortly after childbirth. As a child, Soaphead Church reads voraciously, immersing himself in the works of writers who considered themselves misanthropes, but instead of expanding intellectually and morally through literature, he interprets the texts in ways that suit his own views. His father's violence and strict discipline force him to develop rigid habits and a hatred of disorder and decay.

Soaphead Church's upbringing contributes to his hatred of his own black heritage. The hatred of disorder and decay instilled in him by his father later translates into a hatred of blackness, which he associated with these things. The books Soaphead Church reads reinforce and justify his hatred of others, and his interpretations keep these views from being challenged.

At seventeen, Soaphead Church meets a woman named Velma, and marries. She is drawn to his meticulous habits and lack of humor, as she desires to introduce him to the pleasure and joy of life. After two months of marriage, however, Velma realizes that she will never change him, and leaves. Soaphead returns to his father and focuses on his studies to avoid the pain of being abandoned by his wife. He decides to join the ministry, but after he is told that he has no calling, he leaves for the United States. He studies psychology, sociology, and physical therapy, until his father eventually refuses to support anymore him until he "finds himself". Eventually, Soaphead Church moves to Lorain, Ohio, and claims that he is a preacher. The community is impressed by the way he speaks English and the women believe he is a supernatural figure because of his celibacy. They give him the name Soaphead Church, and he assumes the identity they provide for him.

The obsession with cultivating whiteness makes Soaphead Church unable to shed his habits and seriousness, which thwarts his relationship with Velma, his chance at love in the real world. He turns to his studies, which allow him to move toward whiteness, and simultaneously avoid the pain of losing his marriage or of living in the real world. He remains unable live up to his father's request to "find himself", since self-discovery would mean confronting his black heritage. Instead, he moves to Loraine and assumes a role that allows him to feel closer to his white ancestry, as an educated, superior, supernaturally inclined "leader" of sorts.

Soaphead Church moves in with a woman named Bertha Reese. He doesn't mind living with her because she is clean, quiet, and orderly, but he hates her dog, Bob. Because of the dog's uncleanliness, Soaphead Church wishes Bob would hurry up and die. He considers his wish humane because the dog is old, but he never considers that his own comfort may be the source of the wish. He buys poison to kill the dog, but is unable to go through with killing it because he can't bear the thought of going near the dirty animal.

His deep hatred of Bob's uncleanliness, which he associates with his own blackness, inspires him to wish death upon the dog. His views, distorted by the self-righteousness—which in reality masks his self-hatred—make him unable to see the cruelty of this wish. This same thinking later allows him to trick Pecola into killing the dog.

Soaphead Church begins counseling community members who come to him for advice. They bring their maladies, concerns, and wishes to him, asking for help. Because of the sad nature of those who came to him for help, Soaphead Church becomes aware that something is wrong with the world and blames it on God for designing an imperfect universe. He believes he could have done a better job than God.

Soaphead Church's self-righteousness and vanity, which serve as defenses against his own racial self-hatred, become so extreme that he believes he is superior to God, demonstrating the way that worship of whiteness distorts black views of themselves and the world.

One day Pecola knocks on Soaphead's door. She comes into his house, holding her hands over her pregnant stomach. When he asks Pecola what he can do for her, she asks if he can give her **blue eyes**. He tells Pecola that she must make an offering to nature. He goes into his icebox and pulls out some meat, and then he poisons it and tells Pecola to give it to the dog, Bob, sleeping on the front porch. He says that if the dog behaves strangely, God has heard her prayer. Pecola gives the poisoned meat to the dog, which promptly kills the animal. Terrified by the sight of the dying dog, Pecola runs home.

Soaphead Church, like his ancestors, abuses the power he has gained through his white heritage to exploit Pecola for his own ends. Pecola's deep desire for blue eyes—driven by her own self-hatred, which has only increased after her father raped her—drives her to accept Soaphead Church's dubious solution without question. Pecola's response to the dog's death shows the way that exploitation of black individuals by whites is deeply traumatic.

After Pecola runs away, Soaphead Church sits down at his night table and writes a letter to God. In his letter he expresses his feelings in his own words. He writes about how Velma left him just as one leaves a hotel room. He writes that no one cares about a hotel room, and leaves easily once it is no longer needed. He writes about his desire for young girls, and blames God for allowing his desire to stray from God toward little girls. He blames God for not answering the prayers of little girls, and forcing them to come to him for help. He finishes the letter by telling God that he has given Pecola blue eyes because God had refused to do it himself, although nobody would be able to see them but her.

The reader gains access to the severity of Soaphead Church's delusional mindset in the letter. Through describing his relationship with Velma in terms of a hotel room, he speaks to his lack of home and family he feels. He blames God for his attraction to young girls, showing the way in which self-conceptions of dirtiness, ugliness, and guilt are externalized in order to preserve a superior sense of self—it's not his fault; it's God's. His obsession with his own whiteness, allows Soaphead Church to believe that he has done the work God wouldn't do, depicting the extreme sense of power attained by whiteness. And he realizes that by inflicting even more trauma on Pecola he can force her into her own isolated world in which she sees exactly what she wants to see, just as Soaphead himself does.

CHAPTER 10

Summer arrives and brings storms that both frighten and please Claudia. She imagines her mother in the summer of 1929 when a tornado hit Loraine and destroyed much of the town. In the fantasy she envisions her mother getting swept up by strong winds. Her mother is calm and collected as the town crumbles around her, and she is carried off, smiling with one hand resting on her hip. Claudia says the changing of the seasons is the "moirai" of the community members' lives, and their private lives become affected by public reality.

Claudia's fantasies of her mother symbolically represent the situation in town after the community becomes aware of Pecola's pregnancy. The tornado represents Pecola's pregnancy, which threatens to reveal the self-hatred and ugliness of the community. Facing the facts of their community would have a devastating effect, as public realities (the unspoken hatred and ugliness) would be revealed and begin to affect private lives. Claudia's vision of her mother shows how individuals ignore the realities of the community—focusing on their own homes, and cleaning, and while comforted by that are also made distant and unreachable. The reference to the "moirai," also known in Greek mythology as "the fates," speaks to the powerlessness of the community—each season brings changes, and these changes are fated, meaning the community has no control over them. The force of these changes comes from the larger cultural context; mainly the racist atmosphere existing in the U.S. during the time the novel takes place.

The girls sell packets of **marigold** seeds, planning to use the money they earn to buy a new bike. Their mother tells them not to visit the homes of people they don't know, but the girls go to homes all over town. As they enter different homes, they begin to overhear conversations about Pecola and begin to understand that Pecola is pregnant with her father's baby. Pecola's mother beat her when she found out what happened, and Cholly run's away. Some community members believe Pecola is to blame for the horrible situation. Some believe she should be pulled out of school. Others hope the baby dies.

The community members want Pecola removed from school and the community because her pregnancy, the result or racial-self hatred, self-perceived ugliness, sexual violence, and oppression, exposes these underlying facts of their lives. The baby's death would provide the ultimate solution to this problem, removing the symbol of their hidden reality so everyone can comfortably ignore it.

Claudia and Frieda feel ashamed and embarrassed for Pecola. Nobody in the community seems to share their sorrow. They find that people are disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged and even excited by the situation, but none show any compassion for Pecola. Claudia and Frieda are not concerned with the incestuous nature of Pecola's pregnancy, as they do not full understand how babies are conceived. Claudia imagines the baby in Pecola's womb, and believes that if the baby lives it will counteract the universal love of white baby dolls and little white girls. Because of this desire to change the universal love of white girls, the girls decide to take action to change the outcome of the situation. They bury the money they'd been saving for their bicycle by Pecola's house and plant **marigold** seeds in their back yard. They believe they will know the miracle has occurred when the **marigolds** bloom.

Unlike the community, Claudia and Frieda have not been damaged by racism and violence. This comes in part by their age, but also perhaps because of the stability of their home and family. They do not fear the symbolic meaning of Pecola's baby, because they are not burdened by racial self-hatred and self-perceived ugliness, and have nothing to hide. At the same time, Claudia's belief that the birth of a black baby will create a change in the way the community worships white beauty and hates blackness is innocent, naïve, and perhaps desperate. The futility of this wish is represented symbolically when the baby dies. These issues are too enormous and deeply rooted to counteract.

CHAPTER 11

This chapter opens with a dialog between Pecola and her imaginary friend, whose voice appears in italics on the page. The imaginary friend berates Pecola for compulsively looking into the mirror. Pecola believes she has received **blue eyes**, and cannot keep herself from looking at them. Pecola accuses her imaginary friend and Mrs. Breedlove of being jealous of her blue eyes. Her imaginary friend is the only person Pecola communicates with, as she has been taken out of school, and the community will not interact with her. Pecola believes she has been ostracized because people are prejudiced against her eyes, which are bluer than theirs.

Pecola's outcome represents the ultimate destructive force of black obsession with white beauty standards. As the result of her obsession and the traumas she has experienced, Pecola slips into a psychosis, and becomes totally self-consumed, as shown by the conversations she holds with her imaginary friend (which is really herself) and her obsessive gazing in the mirror. Removed from the community and her family, she is completely isolated, and in her delusion, believes others ostracize her not because they hate what she reveals about themselves but rather because they envy her blue eyes.

The topic of their conversation then turns to Cholly. Pecola's imaginary friend suggests that Mrs. Breedlove ignores Pecola because she misses Cholly. When Pecola responds by asking why Mrs. Breedlove would miss him, her imaginary friend responds by saying she probably loved him, and that's why she let him "do it" to her all of the time. Pecola says she "did it" with him all of the time because he made her. Her imaginary friend says that Cholly could make anyone do anything, and that Cholly made Pecola have sex with him, and that he tried to do it again at another time while Pecola was on the couch. Pecola says she tried to tell Mrs. Breedlove, but she wouldn't listen. The imaginary friend continues to pry about the rape, but Pecola changes the subject, focusing once again on her **blue eyes**. She reveals that she is still insecure about her eyes, that maybe they aren't the bluest eyes in the world. When the imaginary friend leaves, Pecola believes it is because her eyes aren't blue enough, and asks if she will come back if she gets the bluest eyes. The imaginary friend says she will, "right before [her] very eyes.

Pecola's conversations with her imaginary friend reveal her perceptions of what has happened to her. The focus on sex in this portion of the dialog demonstrates the destructive consequences of sexual violence in Pecola's life. Going back and forth with herself about whether Cholly loved Mrs. Breedlove or forced her to have sex demonstrates Pecola's inability to fully understand what has happened. Continuing to pry about the rape shows the oppressive power of the event over her psyche. She distracts herself from the incident by focusing again on her eyes, showing the way the eyes provide temporary relief from the trauma of the rape. Her insecurity about whether they are blue enough, however, shows that the black obsession for whiteness is ultimately a futile endeavor—it can never be achieved.

Claudia then begins to narrate the story. She describes Pecola's insanity and the way the community has disowned her. After the baby is delivered premature and stillborn, Claudia and Frieda don't go near Pecola because they feel they have failed her by not planting the flowers correctly. Pecola moves with her mother to the edge of town, Sammy runs away, and Cholly dies in a workhouse. Claudia believes the community, including herself, has dumped their garbage on Pecola, and uses her to feel better about their own lives. Against Pecola's ugliness, they may feel beautiful, her guilt sanctifies them, her pain makes them feel healthy, and her awkwardness allows them to believe they have a sense of humor. But Claudia knows these feelings, derived at Pecola's expense, are just fantasies.

After he rape, Pecola embodies the ugliness of racial-self hatred. She moves with her mother to the outskirts of town, representing symbolically how the community has pushed her to the fringes of society. The community uses Pecola as a reference against which they measure their own worth and develop a sense of superiority, but Claudia knows that these comparisons are used as an attempt to cover their own self-contempt.

Claudia believes that the Maginot Line and Cholly loved Pecola, but love is only as good as the person giving it. Cholly's love for Pecola led him to rape her, and in turn destroy her entire life. In the end, Claudia comes to believe that it was not her fault for planting the seeds too deep in the earth, but the earth itself that was barren. The earth, she states, is hostile to certain kinds of flowers, and when the earth refuses to sustain a certain type of flower, the blame is placed on the flower. Claudia knows this reasoning is flawed, but she knows it doesn't matter anymore, "it's much, much, much, too late."

The idea of love is complicated at the end of The Bluest Eye. While the love of whiteness deforms the black characters, and love paired with anger allows Cholly to rape his daughter, Claudia, who is not as deformed by racism and white beauty standards, possesses the capacity to love Pecola and her baby, which is shown by her desire for the baby to live, and in a larger sense, through the compassion with which she tells Pecola's story. In the end, as described about her metaphor about the earth and flowers, she finds forgiveness and love for herself, realizing that the fault for what happened rests in the racist atmosphere of the community and the world, pointing out that racism is an issue that exists collectively and remains bigger than any single racist individual.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Powers, Jacob. "*The Bluest Eye*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 21 Dec 2013. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Powers, Jacob. "*The Bluest Eye*." LitCharts LLC, December 21, 2013. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-bluest-eye.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Bluest Eye* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. Vintage. 2007.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. New York: Vintage. 2007.