Wise Blood

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

The daughter of a real estate agent in Georgia, Mary Flannery O'Connor studied Social Sciences at Georgia State College for Women, and then went on to study at the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she began work on what would become *Wise Blood*. Over the course of her career she published two novels, two collections of short stories, and many essays. She was a devout Catholic and keen observer of life in the South. After being diagnosed with lupus, the disease that had killed her father, O'Connor was given five years to live, but continued to live on her ancestral farm for fourteen more, raising birds and writing. Her work has won numerous awards and honors, and she is now considered one of the most important American writers of the twentieth century.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The war from which Hazel is returning is presumably World War II, although it is never discussed outright in the book. The picture painted by O'Connor's novel of the post-war situation in the South highlights a few of the important issues of the era, particularly the struggle of women and minorities for equality. O'Connor showcases a number of instances of overt racism or misogyny, and the female and African-American characters that appear in the novel in service roles – the many waitresses and the porter in the train – are often fierce, steeled against the hardships of the world they live within, while the white police force, in particular, is painted as grotesque, insensitive, and cruel.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

O'Connor's writing fits within the tradition of literature of the American South, particularly among works focusing on certain grotesque features of the region, including the writings of William Faulkner, for example. Faulkner's *Light in August*, for instance, examines many themes that are also found in O'Connor's work, including religion, the outsider, racism, sexism, and the animal instinct. O'Connor studied at the University of Iowa, birthplace of many great writers, where she met Robert Penn Warren, another influential writer of Southern literature, who wrote *All the King's Men*. O'Connor's insistence on the darkness of humanity, and her resistance to the idea of progress that was at the heart of modernism in the twentieth century, have also led her work to be compared to that of writers like Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The Scarlet Letter*).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Wise Blood*
- **When Written:** 1947-52
- **Where Written:** Iowa, New York, Georgia
- **When Published:** May 15, 1952
- **Literary Period:** Southern Gothic
- **Genre:** Southern Gothic Novel
- **Setting:** Taulkinham, Tennessee
- **Climax:** In the novel's climax, both protagonists commit separate murders. Hazel runs down the man hired to be his imposter with his car, and Enoch murders the man in the Gonga the Gorilla suit.
- **Antagonist:** Asa Hawks
- **Point of View:** Third person, following the perspective of various characters

EXTRA CREDIT

Chicken. When she was six, Flannery O'Connor starred in a short Pathé News film featuring her chicken, which had been trained to walk backwards.

Georgia Peacocks. Before dying of lupus at age 39, Flannery O'Connor lived on a farm in Georgia and raised many exotic birds, including some 100 peafowl.

PLOT SUMMARY

Flannery O'Connor's novel follows the experience of two protagonists, Hazel Motes and Enoch Emory.

Hazel, or Haze, is from the small town of Eastrod, but everyone in his family is now dead, and he has no home to return to after serving in the army. He was raised very religiously and planned to become a preacher like his grandfather, who instilled in him a strong sense of his own guilt and the deadliness of sin, both of which require the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Over the course of his time in the army, though, Hazel comes to believe that there is no such thing as a soul, and he becomes a passionate atheist.

As he makes his way to a new life in Taulkinham, Hazel has a series of awkward, bitter interactions with the people he encounters, who often mistake him for a preacher – he has a quarrel with Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock on the train, and a porter whom Hazel is convinced comes from Eastrod leaves him locked in his berth after he has a nightmare about **coffins**. Another quarrel about his identity as a preacher ensues with the taxi driver who takes Hazel from the train station to the

home of Mrs. Leora Watts, a prostitute whose address Hazel finds in a bathroom stall. After Leora tells Hazel that "Momma don't care" if he's a preacher, he sleeps with her, the first time he has been with a woman. The next day he encounters the blind preacher, Asa Hawks, and his daughter, Sabbath Lily, and follows them, followed in turn by the eighteen-year-old Enoch Emory, who is a newcomer working at the zoo in Taulkinham.

After a confrontation with Asa Hawks, Hazel decides to found the Church Without Christ to preach his message that Jesus is a liar, that all men are "clean," and there is no such thing as sin or redemption. Hazel buys himself a **car** with forty dollars, a beat-up old Essex that barely runs, but he is convinced it is perfect. He finds Enoch at the zoo, but cannot get Enoch to tell him the Hawks' address. He follows the Hawks home one night, and ends up renting a room upstairs in their boarding house. He decides to seduce the daughter, Sabbath, as a means of proving his convictions to Asa, but fails to reckon with Sabbath's wily, experienced, and persistent attempts to seduce him in return. Hazel begins to preach from on top of his car outside of movie theaters, but fails to gather any disciples – except for one, Onnie Jay Holy (whose real name is Hoover Shoats), who turns out to be a conman, interested only in using Hazel's platform to make money. When Hazel rejects his efforts, revealing that the "new jesus" he has been preaching about is only a figure of speech, Shoats recruits another man, Solace Layfield, to impersonate Hazel, and begins to preach across the street from him.

Hazel is deeply affected by the sight of his double, combined with his discovery that Asa Hawks is a fraud – a man who lost his nerve and failed to blind himself in his early days as a committed preacher, but then pretended to be blind. Hazel returns home in his car to find Sabbath waiting in his bed. He undresses entirely, except for his **hat**, which she takes off for him, calling him the "king of the beasts" as he finally gives in to her romantic advances. The next day Hazel resolves to escape and leave the city, but seems to snap entirely when Sabbath appears in the doorway cradling a mummy that Enoch delivered that morning, forming a Madonna-like image. Hazel destroys the mummy, and that night he follows his impersonator, Solace Layfield, and confronts him in his car. Hazel tells Solace to take off his suit and hat, and then Hazels runs him over with his car, killing him.

Enoch, meanwhile, is a lonely eighteen-year-old boy, who has lived in Taulkinham for two months and works at the city zoo. He displays more "animal" tendencies in contrast to Hazel's spiritual side, and is deeply affected by food, women, animals, and aggression in any form. Possibly mentally ill, Enoch is driven by the instincts he refers to as his "wise **blood**." When he first encounters Hazel, Enoch follows him like a lost dog looking for a friend. Later, he draws Hazel into his daily ritual in the city park, desperate to show him the dark secret center of the city that only he knows about – a shrunken corpse in the city museum. Hazel runs away, however, and throws a stone at Enoch's head when he tries to follow him.

Later, Enoch finds himself following the voice of his "wise blood," despite his efforts to avoid its call. He cleans up a tabernacle-like cabinet in his room, and then feels compelled to go to the movie theater, where he finally runs out during a movie about an orangutan who saves children from a burning building – Enoch feels a deep antagonism toward animals. Hearing Hazel preaching afterward about the need for a "new jesus," Enoch realizes that his task will be to steal the shrunken man from the museum. This is what the cabinet in his room has been prepared to receive. On his way to deliver the corpse to Hazel, though, burning with regret and tormented by the rain, Enoch stumbles upon a publicity event for Gonga the Gorilla, where the star will appear to shake the hands of a line of waiting children.

Planning to insult the gorilla, and ready for his "supreme moment," Enoch waits in line, but when he shakes Gonga's warm hand – the first that has been offered to him since he arrived in Taulkinham – he finds himself telling Gonga about himself and his life. The human actor behind the gorilla's mask leans forward and tells him to go to hell, and Enoch runs away, humiliated. After delivering the damaged bundle to Sabbath Hawks, Enoch waits for his reward from the new jesus, and finds it in a newspaper advertisement for Gonga's last appearance. Enoch sneaks into the back of the truck with the "gorilla," and murders him with the sharp end of his broken umbrella. Then Enoch leaves the truck, strips, buries his clothes, and puts on the gorilla suit, transforming in a moment of ultimate joy. He comes across a couple on the edge of the woods and tries to shake their hands, but they run away. He is left sitting alone, looking out over the city.

Meanwhile, Hazel has cleaned off Solace's blood from his car and decides to leave the city forever, eager to start a new life elsewhere. On the highway five miles out of town, though, he is stopped by a vengeful police officer, who tricks him into driving to the top of a hill and then pushes his car off the embankment. In that moment, Hazel seems to withdraw entirely into himself, and doesn't respond to the policeman at all. He walks the five miles back to town, buys some lime and a bucket, and blinds himself, as Asa had promised and failed to do years earlier. Mrs. Flood, his landlady, becomes more and more obsessed with Hazel's strange ways, as he goes on living a very monkish lifestyle in the house, throwing away whatever money he doesn't spend on rent and barely speaking to anyone. Mrs. Flood discovers that Hazel is walking miles each day in shoes that are filled with stones and glass, and that he wears barbed wire around his chest. When Mrs. Flood confronts him about this, Hazel tells her that he has to pay, and that he is unclean. More and more curious about the mysteries that drive Hazel, Mrs. Flood proposes that they get married, but this horrifies him. After Mrs. Flood's proposal, Hazel dresses and leaves,

going out into a freezing storm. He is found two days later by a pair of policemen, one of whom accidentally kills Hazel by hitting him over the head with a billy club. Thinking he is still alive, the policemen deliver Hazel to Mrs. Flood. She props his dead body up in her bed and stares into his empty eye sockets, her own eyes closed, imagining the dark world inside of him gradually receding into the distance until all that is left is a single point of light.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hazel 'Haze' Motes – A young soldier returning from the war, whose whole family has died, leaving him alone in the world. He was raised in a very religious family – his grandfather was a country preacher – but he has grown to reject all religion as false, and is angered by the vision of sin and redemption that it offers. Hazel is odd, lonely, fierce, and proud, and is constantly being mistaken for a preacher. Part of this is because he always wears the same severe-looking **hat**. In Taulkinham Hazel meets Enoch Emory and becomes fascinated and then disgusted with the blind preacher Asa Hawks, founding the Church Without Christ as a protest against Hawks and his daughter, Sabbath Lily. Hazel seems to be always trying to escape his religious calling, albeit unsuccessfully.

Enoch Emory – Enoch is an eighteen-year-old boy, a newcomer in Taulkinham, and desperate for friendship and human connection. He is animalistic in his approach to life, invested in rituals that indulge in the baser side of humanity – insulting people, lusting after women, eating sugary food, and interacting with the animals at the zoo where he works. He is a deeply instinctual outsider, tortured by certain parts of his past and driven by his "wise **blood**" to perform actions over which he seemingly has no control. He latches onto Hazel as a friend and guiding force.

Sabbath Lily Hawks / The Young Girl – The teenaged daughter of Asa Hawks, Sabbath helps her father in his begging and preaching ventures, fully knowing that he is a fraud. She decides early in the novel to seduce Hazel, and turns out to be more wily and experienced than he realizes at first. She is fascinated with children, telling multiple short parables about unwanted or dangerous children.

Asa Hawks / The Blind Man – The father of Sabbath Lily Hawks, he earns money begging as a blind preacher, but is in fact a fraud. The scars on his face are from a real event, at which he had promised to blind himself for Jesus, but he lost his nerve before he could put any of the dangerous lime into his eyes. Hazel becomes obsessed with this dark figure, who claims, correctly, that he (Hazel) will never be able to escape from Jesus.

Mrs. Flood – The landlady at the boarding house where Asa Hawks and Sabbath Lily Hawks have a room, and where Hazel moves in upstairs. The final chapter is told from her perspective, recounting her developing relationship with the injured Hazel, through the moment when Mrs. Flood asks Hazel to marry her. She doesn't believe much in religion, but is eager to make sure that she is not being cheated in any way by people who seem to see something she doesn't.

Onnie Jay Holy/Hoover Shoats – A scam artist and former radio preacher, he attempts to partner with Hazel to make money by founding the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ. When Hazel reveals that the "new jesus" is only a figure of speech, Hoover hires Solace Layfield to impersonate Hazel as the Prophet in *his* church, and runs a rival operation across the street from where Hazel is preaching.

The Policeman – A policeman who pulls Hazel over as he is on his way away from Taulkinham. The policeman tells Hazel that he pulls him over because he doesn't like his face. He tricks Hazel into driving his **car** to the top of a hill, and then pushes it off over the embankment.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Leora Watts – A large blond woman, presumably a prostitute, who has "the friendliest bed in town." Hazel goes to her house after finding her address written in a bathroom stall at the train station, and she takes his virginity.

Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock – A talkative woman on the train that Hazel takes to Taulkinham, she mistakes him for a preacher. Later Hazel encounters her in the corridor of the train on her way to bed. She is half-blind without her glasses, and her hair is in "revolting" curlers.

Maude – A waitress at the Frosty Bottle in the city park. Enoch goes in every day to harass her and order a chocolate shake. She has muscles like a man and drinks whisky from a fruit jar under the counter.

Gonga the Gorilla – A man in a gorilla suit who stars in movies (where people think he is a real gorilla). He comes to Taulkinham to shake hands with his fans, and Enoch becomes obsessed by him.

Solace Layfield – The man hired by Hoover Shoats to impersonate Hazel Motes as the Prophet of Holy Church of Christ Without Christ. He has six kids, and consumption. Hazel runs him over with his **car**.

The Porter – An African-American porter in the train that carries Hazel to Taulkinham. Hazel is convinced that he is from the Parrum family of his hometown, Easton, but the porter insists that he is from Chicago.

Taxi Driver – The man who drives Hazel from the train station in Taulkinham to Leora Watts' house. He is convinced that Hazel is a preacher.

Slade – The owner of a used **car** dealership and junkyard, he

sells Hazel his car after some bartering. He has a son who works at the dealership and curses almost without ceasing.

The Woman (with the two little boys) – A woman who frequents the city swimming pool, where Enoch watches her. She comes to haunt Hazel.

Mary Brittle – An advice columnist who exchanges letters with Sabbath Hawks.

The One-Armed Man – A silent gas-station attendant in the country, who helps Hazel to restart his **car**, asking for nothing in return.

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.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF, REDEMPTION, AND SIN

Religion is at the core of O'Connor's novel, as Hazel Motes struggles against the belief he was born into, and Enoch follows his own strange mysteries, investing faithfully in private rites and rituals.

Raised by a preacher, Hazel believed that he would become a preacher himself, but after time abroad in the war he became an impassioned atheist. Now Hazel struggles against that faith, a struggle that is both external (he aggressively struggles against Christians and preachers he encounters) but also internal, as he is never entirely able to escape the Christian tradition into which he was born. He struggles against it, he denies it, but it still defines him. Hazel even goes on to found the Church Without Christ as a protest against the work of street preacher Asa Hawks, with whom he becomes obsessed.

Hazel is constantly being mistaken for a preacher, an impression that is reinforced by his suit and hat, as much as his serious air. His frustrated denial of any religious affiliation is received with simple disbelief by his cab driver, and with smiling dismissal by Leora Watts. Hazel's over-the-top anger at these constant misunderstandings suggest that he is fleeing a spiritual calling that is somehow visible to those around him, but which he refuses to recognize. O'Connor fills Hazel's landscape with evangelizing signs promoting Christianity and religious symbols, from hand-painted rocks to the image of the Madonna and Child formed by Sabbath Hawks cradling the shrunken corpse that Enoch steals from the museum. These signs chip away at his resolve, driving him into a rage.

Hazel is most passionately opposed to the idea that men are all born with sin, and can only be redeemed through a belief in Jesus. He argues at multiple points in the novel that everyone is clean, denying the existence of sin and asking his listeners to point to where, exactly, the redeeming blood of Jesus has touched them, denying the existence of any redemption that is not physically present in the here and now. At the same time, Hazel is clearly very deeply affected by a sense of inner guilt, and feels the need to repent with physical self-harm when he has done something wrong – a feeling that began when he found his way into an erotic sideshow at a local fair as a child, and later walked a mile in rock-filled shoes to redeem himself.

At the novel's conclusion, it is revealed that Hazel has been silently punishing himself by wearing barbed wire beneath his shirt, presumably repenting for the murder he commits earlier in the novel, when he runs down the man hired to by Onnie Jay Holy as his imposter in a car. He tells Mrs. Flood, his landlady, that he is "unclean," something that he has violently denied throughout he novel. This leaves the reader to question whether he has finally given in to the religious fate – the deep spiritual consciousness of sin, guilt, and redemption - that has followed him from childhood.

Enoch displays signs of faith as well, although not in a strictly Christian sense; he invests heavily in ritual and shows a reverence for the "purpose of things," going about his days in a way that feels almost sacramental. He has an unshakeable, mystical belief in the 'new jesus,' a small, shrunken corpse that he steals from the city's museum, and a deep, fearful appreciation for everything that he doesn't understand. Ultimately, O'Connor's novel seems to endorse a type of Christianity – personal, intense, uncompromising – that is tortuously difficult, if not impossible, to come to in today's shallow world.

FREE WILL VS. DESTINY

Although Hazel tries to assert his free will by escaping religion, his destiny seems to be tied irreversibly to belief and the life of a preacher, which finds him wherever he goes. Enoch, too, is driven by a sense of destiny that he thinks of as the calling of his 'wise **blood**,' although he too tries to fight against it in certain moments, also without success. Both characters seem driven by the accumulation of events outside of their control into the murders they commit, which raises the question of responsibility. Are we in control of our actions? Can we be evil – or good – without free will?

Hazel's quest for freedom is symbolized most fully by his **car**, which represents mobility, control, and independence. But of course, it is perpetually broken down, comically denying Hazel the free will he craves.

After he finally gives in to Sabbath's romantic advances, his desperate urge to escape from her the next morning is driven by the hope that his car provides him – but this hope proves

futile when his sickness prevents him from leaving. The fact that his car then becomes the murder weapon suggests that Hazel is, in fact, responsible for the murder of Solace Layfield, the sickly impostor hired by 'Onnie Jay Holy' to impersonate him, since his car represents his will. Later, the moment when Hazel's car is pushed to its destruction by the smiling police officer triggers his final collapse into his religious 'destiny,' as he becomes a silent ascetic, punishing himself physically in secret for the sins he has committed. The police baton that finally ends his life, almost accidentally, is in some ways another emblem of fate – he had tried, one last time, to exercise his free will in escaping the marriage proposal of his landlady, Mrs. Flood, and this senseless death serves as a final punishment for that search for freedom.

Enoch has been assailed, since childhood, with the voice of his 'wise blood,' which drives his actions even when he attempts to disobey, often leading him into situations he would rather avoid, like Jonah in the whale, brought to Ninevah against his will. There is a suggestion here that Enoch suffers from some sort of mental illness, which again raises questions about his level of responsibility for the impulsive (and destructive) choices that he makes. The reader witnesses his struggle to avoid the calling of his 'wise blood,' to exercise his free will, and also sees his will collapse in small and then larger ways, as his 'destiny' draws him to movies he would rather not see, and then, escalating in intensity, on to the murder of Gonga the Gorilla.

Ultimately, O'Connor's novel presents two characters whose struggle to preserve their free will in the face of the force of destiny fails, with disastrous results. What value there is to be found in Hazel's final, saint-like state suggests that the goal of man should be a stoic resignation to the forces of fate.

INSTINCT AND THE ANIMAL

The novel's treatment of its two main characters, Hazel and Enoch, illustrates a classic divide between the spiritual and the animal sides of humanity.

While Hazel constantly attempts to escape his spiritual calling and often acts instinctively as a means of avoiding it, he ultimately fails to escape his inner spiritualism. In the moment that he finally gives in to Sabbath Hawks' attempts at seduction, for instance, she throws away his **hat**. This is the last item of his clothing, which is often thought of as separating men from animals, to be stripped off. It is also a symbol of his spiritual calling, since it often causes him to be mistaken for a preacher. As she removes the hat, Sabbath drives this transition from the spiritual to the animal home when she calls him the 'king of the beasts.' This animal moment does not last long, however – by the next morning Hazel is eager to escape again, deeply uncomfortable with Sabbath's fleshly appetites. By the end of the novel, he has retreated completely from the world by blinding himself, withdrawing further and further into himself such that his landlady Mrs. Flood suggests that he ought to live in a "monkery."

Enoch, in contrast, is a pure vessel for the animal urges of his 'wise blood,' driven by instincts that seem outside of his control until he is finally stripped of his humanity and takes on the form of a gorilla. Enoch's antagonistic relationship to animals is a running theme of the novel, as he insults the bears at the zoo, feels threatened by a painting of a moose in his room, and is terrified by Gonga the Gorilla. His actions, though, are often animal-like, driven by instinct. He burrows down through a tunnel to hide in the bushes and eye the women swimming in the pool near the zoo, and prowls about town indulging his habits and appetites, reveling in 'base' pleasures – sugary food, women, insults. When the reader is first introduced to Enoch, he follows Hazel like a wounded animal looking for help, resembling nothing more than a lost puppy, doggedly pursuing a friend (or, even, a master). In some ways, though, Enoch's intense devotion to the rituals of his life, the calling of his blood, and the mummy-like figure of the 'new jesus,' suggest an inner spiritualism, an animal-like fear and appreciation for mysteries he does not understand.

O'Connor doesn't just limit her exploration of animal behaviors to Hazel and Enoch. In fact, the novel portrays a grotesque, animal aspect to all of the people in the town. Their uglier instincts rear up in the form of offhand racism, persistent sexism, and dishonesty. Many characters are driven by instinct or desire, and O'Connor's prose does not give much room to the intellectual or spiritual side of these figures, whose animal nature sometimes seems to assail Hazel's attempt to communicate a deeper spiritual truth. One striking image comes when, at the pool, the woman with two kids catches Hazel watching her and leers back, undoing her shoulder straps. Hazel is so taken aback by this open display – reminiscent of an animal's mating ritual – that he jumps up violently, retreating to his car.

THE NATURE OF TRUTH

Perhaps Hazel's most lucid and compelling point as a preacher is the assertion that there is no truth, aside from the truth that there is no truth. He promotes empiricism, the belief that one can only know whatever one has direct experience of, and rejects those who claim to find truth through faith. This intellectual argument, though piercing, has little effect on the few listeners who assemble to hear Hazel's speeches in the street.

On the other hand, the secondary characters in the novel seem capable of seeing a truth about Hazel that Hazel himself prefers to deny – that is, the spiritual calling that is a product either of his background or his inherent nature. Nearly everyone he meets seems aware of this spiritual side of Hazel, assuming he is a preacher, which only frustrates him. Hazel is

blind to the 'empirical' truth of his life in other ways as well, most obviously in his constant insistence that the broken down old **car** he buys has nothing at all wrong with it. By showing us the ways that Hazel is not always able to see the truth that is in front of him, O'Connor gives the reader a reason to suspect that his denial of Christianity may not be valid either.

In a novel so concerned with the nature of truth, it is significant that the town of Taulkinham is populated by so many liars, from scheming scam artist Hoover Shoats, who becomes a money-grubbing competitor of Hazel's church under the alias Onnie Jay Holy, to lying auto mechanics, to the enigmatic Asa Hawks, who only pretends to be blind. There is a dark humor in the fact that Hazel, who so fervently denies the existence of sin, hates deception so deeply, and is disgusted by the easy lies of the Christian people he attempts to convert away from their religion – since they themselves seem quite comfortable with living sinful lives and telling lies.

Hazel refuses to lie or to compromise his integrity at the request of scam artists like Onnie Jay Holy, even when it would make him money or increase his appeal. Truth is a very important principle to him, even as he denies Christianity's claim to it.

Ultimately it is partly this respect for the truth that seems to drive Hazel's choice to blind himself, an act that rejects the dishonesty of Asa Hawks' false promise to do so many years before. Although still conflicted in the way he discusses Jesus with his landlady, Mrs. Flood, Hazel's actions suggest that he has come around to the idea that there is a deeper, fuller truth to be found in religion – one that can only be found, perhaps, by escaping the shallowness of the world. He says that "if there's no bottom to your eyes, they hold more," and seems to have access, after blinding himself, to a truth about what comes after life that Mrs. Flood, for one, is desperate to uncover.

ISOLATION AND THE OUTSIDER

O'Connor's novel tells the story of two deeply lonely outsiders - Enoch and Hazel – along with a set of supporting characters who are often equally isolated, from the tormented false preacher Asa Hawks to the lovelorn landlady, Mrs. Flood. These lonely characters are often driven primarily by a desire to connect with one another.

Enoch, for example, follows the unwelcoming Hazel in pursuit of a friend. Enoch has habitual (and thorny, characterized by insults) interactions with many people (and animals) – waitresses, salesmen, his landlady – that reveal a desire to belong, but their contempt for him is obvious in O'Connor's descriptions. This pursuit of connection is what pushes him to his most vulnerable moment, when, face to face with Gonga the Gorilla, whose warm, furry handshake is the first offered him since arriving in Taulkinham two months earlier, he makes an attempt to connect by telling the gorilla about his life, only to have the actor behind the mask lean in and tell him to go to hell. Thwarted here, his pursuit of connection continues through his final moment in the novel, when, dressed in the stolen gorilla suit, he reaches out to an unnamed couple in the woods for a handshake, just as he has witnessed Gonga do, and is left sitting alone on a rock when they run away.

Hazel, too, is alone in the world. In the first chapter we are told the story of Hazel's return from the war, and given a window into the deep longing for home that he feels – in many ways this chapter provides the deepest view into Hazel's hard-to-pierce inner thoughts, revealing just how lonely he is. Death is the ultimate isolator – in the first chapter we learn that Hazel has lost every member of his family, and he vividly remembers the closing of each of their **coffins** as he begins to panic, triggered by the coffin-like bunk of the train in which the porter has locked him. Still, although he longs for a home, connection to other people often seems to send Hazel into a blank, withdrawn, or angry state – perhaps because their actions are often disappointing, grotesque, or animalistic. Although conflict draws Hazel out of his shell at a few points in the novel, his interactions with the people around him are nearly always forced and awkward. In fact, by the end of the book it seems that what Hazel wishes above all else is to be isolated from the world, living life as a monk. Finally, after having blinded himself, he withdraws completely into his inner world, and the reader retreats into the lonely Mrs. Flood's perspective as the protagonist becomes silent, his life summed up into a single point of light that she sees retreating into the distance.

SYMBOLS

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

HAZEL'S HAT

Hazel's hat is an outward sign of his outsider status. It is consistently described as "fierce," and leads many to mistake him for a preacher. Halfway through the novel, he buys himself a new hat, this one all white, as a sign of his new direction with the Church Without Christ, but it does nothing to change his outsider status. The hat is also a sign of Hazel's spiritual calling, and is often used to highlight a contrast with the baser, more animal nature of the people around him.

HAZEL'S CAR

Hazel's broken-down car, purchased for forty dollars, is an important symbol in the novel. On the one hand, it represents home, a place that Hazel can call his own—when he is most frustrated by those around him, he always attempts to escape to his car. On the other, it represents

free will, since the mobility that it provides (when it works) offers Hazel the freedom to go wherever he chooses. As he tries to escape his religious destiny, this ever-faulty vehicle of his free will represents the unsuccessful attempts he makes to avoid that destiny, and its ultimate destruction prompts his collapse into repentance. The fact that the car becomes the weapon in Hazel's murder of Onnie Jay Holy's hired imposter also suggests that it wasn't fate that drove Hazel to kill—it was his own free will.

COFFINS

Coffins recur throughout the novel, first in a series of flashbacks that Hazel has of the funerals of his various family members. He is always convinced that they will escape just before the lid can be closed, and they never do. Coffins represent the ultimate trap—death—and the collapse of Hazel's family.

BLOOD

As the novel's title suggest, blood plays an important role in *Wise Blood*. Like O'Connor's other symbols, its significance is split. On the one hand, Hazel often asks those around him about the redemptive blood of Jesus, and where it can be found in the real world. This blood represents the ideas of sin and salvation that he rejects. For Enoch, on the other hand, blood represents the instinctual voice that drives him forward. He has "wise blood," inherited from his father – and in some ways Hazel's strange ways seem inherited as well, from the blood of his mother and grandfather. This wise blood takes over Enoch's free will, pushing him to do things he despises.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Farrar, Strauss and Giroux edition of *Wise Blood* published in 2007.

> In his half-sleep he thought where he was lying was like a coffin. The first coffin he had seen with someone in it was his grandfather's. They had left it propped open with a stick of kindling the night it had sat in the house with the old man in it, and Hazel had watched from a distance, thinking: he ain't going to let them shut it on him; when the time comes, his elbow is going to shoot into the crack. His grandfather had been a circuit preacher, a waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger. When it was time to bury him, they shut the top of his box down and he didn't make a move.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 13-14

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel lies in a bunk of the train's sleeping compartment and reflects on the burials he has seen. Soon he will have an attack of claustrophobia, as the memories of the deaths of his various family members accumulate in his nightmare and overwhelm him. The first image from that string of burials is of his grandfather, a fiery country preacher who terrified and fascinated the young Hazel. That elder Motes, we later learn, instilled in Hazel the dark tendency toward a self-hating, guilty religious sensibility. For this "waspish" man, religion was something pointed and violent, and he often verbally abused the young Hazel to make his point. It is to avoid following in his grandfather's footsteps that Hazel is fleeing now, toward someplace new; he wants to escape the religious destiny that his family background had ordained for him.

In the mind of the younger Hazel, his grandfather had supernatural, frightening powers, but he was nonetheless unable to escape death when his time came. Death comes inescapably to the rest of Hazel's family as well, leaving him an isolated outsider with an ingrained fear of the death that must come to him eventually.

> The boy didn't need to hear it. There was already a black wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin. He knew by the time he was twelve years old that he was going to be a preacher. Later he saw Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel experiences a flashback to his time as a

twelve-year-old boy, following his fiery grandfather and pious mother around the county to witness his grandfather's sermons, which might also be described as holy tirades. From that early age, Hazel's worldview becomes dominated by a fear of Jesus, who has been painted in his life as a dark, wild, vengeful creature. This Jesus is most at home in the wilderness, a nightmarish, creeping figure who haunts Hazel's consciousness, ever intruding on its fringes. This dark Jesus is always hiding just beyond the next corner in Hazel's life, even now that he has decided to flee his religious destiny.

The idea that Hazel could be unknowingly walking on water in the dark until he suddenly realized it and immediately drowned, suggests that what holds Hazel back from his faith is fear, or self-consciousness. It is a dark, frightening image born in the mind of twelve-year-old Hazel, and one that clearly still informs Hazel's morbid worldview as a young man desperately determined to escape the clutches of his religious fate.

❝ They told him he didn't have any soul and left him for their brothel. He took a long time to believe them because he wanted to believe them. All he wanted was to believe them and get rid of it once and for all, and he saw the opportunity here to get rid of it without corruption, to be converted to nothing instead of to evil.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel remembers his introduction to the army, when two of his fellow soldiers invited him to join them at the brothel and he refused for religious reasons, to keep his soul clean. They respond by mocking Hazel's refusal, and at his attempt to convert them, confirming the novel's continual painting of Hazel as an outsider, different from the people around him.

Hazel is intrigued by their idea that he does not have a soul at all, since all his life he has felt chained down by his obligation to resist sin, weighed down by guilt. All he wants is to escape, and to sin deliberately would be one means of doing so – but he does not have the same animal ability to leave his conscience behind exhibited by his fellow soldiers, much as he would like to. He envies them this easy relationship with sin, a relationship that essentially negates the whole concept of sin by denying the existence of the soul. This is the truth that Hazel finishes his time in the army by believing, and now that he is back in the South he is determined to spread this truth – that there is no soul, and no sin, and no evil to be afraid of.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ They stared at each other for almost a minute and neither moved. Then he said in a voice that was higher than his usual voice, "What I mean to have you know is I'm no goddamn preacher."
Mrs. Watts eyed him steadily and with only a slight smirk. Then she put her other hand under his face and tickled it in a motherly way. "That's okay, son," she said. "Momma don't mind if you ain't a preacher."

Related Characters: Leora Watts, Hazel 'Haze' Motes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel puts up resistance for one final moment before giving in to the waiting Mrs. Watts, a town prostitute whose address Hazel found scrawled on a bathroom stall in the town's train station. He has snuck into her bedroom uninvited, but she lies in wait on the bed, a grotesque, motherly figure. The two size one another up in silence, in an animal stare-down that ends when the highly agitated Hazel asserts his most important truth – he is no "goddamn preacher." This protest is unprompted, at least by Mrs. Watts – it's a response, rather, to the misunderstanding of his cab driver, who saw his hat and assumed he was a country preacher, and to the destiny he is desperate to escape.

This desperation is what led him to Mrs. Watts, since he believes that sin as an expression of his free will will finally break the hold that the guilt of religion has over his conscience. Hazel wants to escape his spirituality by chasing the animal in himself, and he comes to the animalistic Mrs. Watts to gain refuge from or otherwise try to escape that spiritual, religious side of himself. Be believes that sex with Mrs. Watts will be proof of his rigid belief in the nonexistence of the soul, an act of principle linked with instinct, but mostly divorced from desire. Mrs. Watts, for her part, misunderstands the frustrated Hazel, forgiving him good-naturedly as if he had been confessing a shameful fact about himself.

Chapter 3 Quotes

"I come a long way," Haze said, "since I would believe anything. I come halfway around the world.
"Me too," Enoch Emery said.
"You ain't come so far that you could keep from following me," the blind man said. He reached out suddenly and his hands covered Haze's face. For a second Haze didn't move or make any sound. Then he knocked the hands off.

Related Characters: Asa Hawks / The Blind Man, Enoch Emory, Hazel 'Haze' Motes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel confronts the blind street preacher, Asa Hawks. Hawks is a figure of what Hazel might have become if he had followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, and Hazel seems fascinated by the dark vision that he represents – a fascination that Hawks picks up on, taking it as evidence that Hazel has some unresolved religious destiny that haunts his past and will inevitably catch back up to him in the future. The surprisingly intimate moment here, initiated by Hawks, who puts his hands over Hazel's face, shows us the kinship between the two dark souls, even as Hazel quickly rejects Hawks' touch. That Hawks presumes he has a right to this intimacy deeply angers Hazel, who has decided to distance himself from his religious destiny and hates being reminded that it follows him in spite of the many miles he has traveled during his time in the military, and the many experiences that ought to have divided him from people like Hawks.

Enoch, meanwhile, pipes up in an attempt to join in, desperate as he is for connection, but is ignored by all parties. He is an outsider, even here among society's outsiders.

"Sweet Jesus Christ Crucified," he said, "I want to tell you people something. Maybe you think you're not clean because you don't believe. Well you are clean, let me tell you that. Every one of you people are clean and let me tell you why if you think it's because of Jesus Christ Crucified you're wrong. I don't say he wasn't crucified but I say it wasn't for you. Listenhere, I'm a preacher myself and I preach the truth."

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel makes up his mind to become a sort of anti-preacher, finding at long last the purpose behind his voyage to Taulkinham and the self-made expression of free will that he believes most perfectly subverts the religious destiny he hopes to avoid. Ironically, though, this new role will only further the public perception that he is a man of religion, and reveals his continuing obsession with the Church (even if that obsession reveals itself through his anti-Church teachings). This irony is encapsulated in Hazel's choice to begin his tirade with a curse that actually just invokes the figure, Christ, that Hazel had hoped to reject.

Rather than giving up the spiritual as he had hoped, he finds himself focused on it from another direction, reacting in anger against Asa Hawks' Christian evangelizing by evangelizing on behalf of his own, particular atheism.The most important principle of Hazel's new Church at this early stage is a vicious devotion to the truth, an atheistic truth that rejects any comfort Christianity might offer. At the same time, though, it relieves any guilt that Christianity might impose, by claiming that everyone is already clean and does not need to be cleaned, spiritually, by the sacrifice of the crucifixion. This obsession with cleanliness is a major part of Hazel's relationship to religion – he has been brought up to feel the guilt of sin very acutely, and fought all of his life to escape from the sense of dirtiness that his grandfather's version of Christianity suggested followed everyone wherever they went.

Mrs. Watts' grin was as curved and sharp as the blade of a sickle. It was plain that she was so well-adjusted that she didn't have to think anymore. Her eyes took everything in whole, like quicksand. "That Jesus-seeing hat!" she said. She sat up and pulled her nightgown from under her and took it off. She reached for his hat and put it on her head and sat with her hands on her hips, walling her eyes in a comical way. Haze stared for a minute, then he made three quick noises that were laughs. He jumped for the electric light cord and took off his clothes in the dark.

Related Characters: Leora Watts (speaker), Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel returns to Mrs. Watts' room one more time. He seeks companionship, perhaps, and also to drown himself in the physical, animal intimacy that he has decided proves he no longer believes in sin or being unclean – that he no longer believes in the soul at all. The notion that visiting a whorehouse is a rejection of the soul has been with Hazel since the army, when his fellow soldiers offered to take him there. Now, Hazel finally finds himself capable of following their example, after having found his purpose in Taulkinham as a preacher of the Church Without Christ. This is a triumphant moment for him, then – but he still has difficulty giving in, at last, to this animal act.

It is not until he sees Mrs. Watts complete disregard for the spiritual, embodied by her comic turn in the preacher hat, that he feels aroused; he is excited by the truly animal simplicity of this woman, who feels no guilt at her dirtiness, existing in a state of innocence that he yearns for desperately. She is "so well-adjusted that she didn't have to think anymore", and he has struggled all his life to escape the thoughts that haunt his every step. Now, finally, he laughs at the naked Mrs. Watts, a true embodiment of the new ideal of cleanliness he preaches in the Church Without Christ – someone who feels no guilt or self-consciousness, an unapologetic servant of instinct. This is what he longs to be, and as he takes off his clothes and "barks," he takes a step closer to his animal nature at long last.

> "What you seen?" she said, using the same tone of voice all the time. She hit him across the legs with the stick, but he was like part of the tree. "Jesus died to redeem you," she said.
> "I never ast him," he muttered.
> She didn't hit him again but she stood looking at him, shut-mouthed, and he forgot the guilt of the tent for the nameless unplaced guilt that was in him.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel experiences a flashback to his youth, when his mother punished him for having looked into a tent in the traveling circus that contained a naked woman, where he also saw his father in the audience. Although she does not know his crime, something in her senses his guilt, and the young Hazel feels this uncleanliness acutely.

The exchange between the two, as she hits his unflinching legs and tells him that "Jesus died to redeem" him, and he mutters back that he "never ast him," perfectly sums up the resentment that Hazel has been conditioned to feel toward a God who, he has been taught to believe, sees him as dirty, stupid, and fallen. He feels a debt to this God, and that debt weighs on him so that he cannot escape it. Hazel remains trapped within this "nameless unplaced guilt," placed upon him by his street preacher grandfather and pious mother, and spends years in the army attempting to escape its grip – it's this same escape attempt that brings him to Taulkinham, where he struggles desperately to deny the inner truth of his religiosity.

> He put his fingers to his forehead and then held them in front of his eyes. They were streaked with red. He turned his head and saw a drop of blood on the ground and as he looked at it, he thought it widened like a little spring. He sat straight up, frozen-skinned, and put his finger in it, and very faintly he could hear his blood beating, his secret blood, in the center of the city. Then he knew that whatever was expected of him was only just beginning.

Related Characters: Enoch Emory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Enoch recovers after Hazel throws a rock that strikes him in the head, as the two of them flee from the museum at the center of the park that houses a shrunken mummy Enoch views as a religious idol. Enoch has gradually pushed Hazel toward this place, in response to the calling of his "wise blood," a sort of prophetic instinct that commands his actions. According to this instinct of Enoch's, Hazel has been chosen to receive the special mystery of the shrunken mummy – but when Enoch shows him, at long last, this secret idol, Hazel angrily rejects this calling. Now, injured and alone again, Enoch is exultant, seeing the world through the streaks of his literal blood. This blood seems magical, imbued with the power to create a spring in the earth.

This moment feels like an ancient ritual of sacrifice, one that might have been appreciated by the makers of the shrunken mummy, for instance. Instinct and religion blend for Enoch,

who feels a deep reverence for the signs the world gives him, and a sense of destiny driven by the "secret blood" spilled in front of him now.

❝ Ten years ago at a revival he had intended to blind himself and two hundred people or more were there, waiting for him to do it. He had preached for an hour on the blindness of Paul, working himself up until he had saw himself struck blind by a Divine flash of lightning and, with courage enough then, he had thrust his hands into the bucket of wet lime and streaked them down his face; but he hadn't been able to let any of it get into his eyes. He had been possessed of as many devils as were necessary to do it, but at that instant, they disappeared, and he saw himself standing there as he was.

Related Characters: Asa Hawks / The Blind Man

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, the dramatic truth behind Asa Hawks' false identity as the blind preacher is revealed. He is not blind at all, in fact; although he had once promised to blind himself, to prove his religious zeal, he was unable to carry out the blinding in front of those who had massed to witness the act. Asa now lives a lie, as a false preacher and beggar. He is not the pure, spiritual threat that Hazel at first saw in him, but a deeply hypocritical, bitter figure whose entire persona is based in a deception. Any true believer in Christ threatens Hazel's claim that there is no soul, but the threat that Asa represents is – in some ways disappointingly, for Hazel, when he discovers the truth – a hollow one.

Back in his days as a preacher, Asa's zeal seemed real enough; he was prepared to blind himself, with a fiery passion that recalls the vengeful rhetoric of Hazel's grandfather. Ultimately, though, this passion was also deceptive, based in a need to over-perform belief. Hazel, later in the novel, rejects this need to perform and the lie at Asa's core by actually blinding himself and withdrawing from the world entirely, retreating into himself and his painful self-inflicted penance.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ They climbed the hill and went down the other side of it, she a little ahead of Haze. He saw that sitting under a tree with her might help him to seduce her, but he was in no hurry to get on with it, considering her innocence. He felt it was too hard of a job to be done in an afternoon. She sat down under a large pine and patted the ground close beside her for him to sit on, but he sat about five feet away from her on a rock. He rested his chin on his knees and looked straight ahead.

Related Characters: Sabbath Lily Hawks / The Young Girl, Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel and Sabbath take a walk in the countryside after Sabbath hides in the back of Hazel's car, hoping to seduce the young newcomer. Barefoot now, Sabbath runs ahead and they find a tree to sit under. This is a romantic situation, but Hazel, the social outsider, is completely oblivious to Sabbath's advances. In fact, he has decided to seduce Sabbath, for reasons of principle – that is, to prove to her father, Asa Hawks, that he is serious in his rejection of the idea of sin and religion.

Having made this decision, he fails completely to take advantage of the situation in front of him, mistaking the truth of Sabbath's intentions and seeing only the innocent idea he has of her. He is statuesque in his studied indifference, ignoring entirely her invitation to sit beside her. Clearly, entering into this animal, physical realm is not something with which he feels truly comfortable, but rather a deliberate, studied expression of his principled rejection of the spiritual. Blind to this truth about himself and the true aims of Sabbath, Hazel reveals his hazy relationship to the truth he claims to worship.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Enoch Emery knew now that his life would never be the same again, because the thing that was going to happen to him had started to happen. He had always known that something was going to happen but he hadn't known what. If he had been much given to thought, he might have thought that now was the time for him to justify his daddy's blood, but he didn't think in broad sweeps like that, he thought what he would do next. Sometimes he didn't think, he only wondered; then before long he would find himself doing this or that, like a bird finds itself building a nest when it hasn't actually been planning to.

Related Characters: Enoch Emory

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Enoch prepares for the destiny he feels coming inevitably toward him. His response to the beginning of this destiny reveals the extent to which he has been preparing for this moment his whole life – there is a sense in which Enoch functions as a prophet, the puppet for some divine instinct transmitted through his blood.

As a foil to Hazel, Enoch does not question this primitive religious sense of destiny. Rather than dwelling on the spiritual in an intellectual way, Enoch does not "think in broad sweeps" at all, focusing only on what is directly in front of him, with an animal's instinct.O'Connor compares this instinct to the nest-building drive of a bird, suggesting that all of Enoch's actions are deeply spontaneous and unplanned, but also part of a larger plan that he cannot see, but which is built into his DNA, inherited through his "daddy's blood."

I ain't going in, he said.

Two doors flew open and he found himself moving down a long red foyer and then up a darker tunnel and then a higher, still darker tunnel. In a few minutes he was up in a high part of the maw, feeling around, like Jonah, for a seat. I ain't going to look at it, he said furiously. He didn't like any picture shows but colored musical ones.

Related Characters: Enoch Emory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Enoch is wandering the town, attempting to avoid the call of his "wise blood," but finds himself inevitably drawn by its command into a movie theater he had stubbornly hoped to escape. Here, O'Connor makes an explicit comparison between Enoch and a famous Old Testament prophet, Jonah, transforming the movie theater into the belly of the whale with a gaping 'maw,' or mouth. Jonah, too, had tried to escape his destiny by denying God's call, but was duly punished by a storm that forced him to jump into the sea, where the whale swallowed him. In his inner dialogue, Enoch repeatedly denies the impulse of his "wise blood," his frustration mounting as instinct continues to overcome his will to deny it.

O'Connor's prose removes the decision-making from Enoch's power – the doors to the cinema "flew open," seemingly without his active participation, and he "found himself moving." He is almost unconscious of the actions of his body, completely out of control of his instinct-driven choices.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Haze stayed in his car about an hour and had a bad experience in it: he dreamed he was not dead but only buried. He was not waiting on the Judgment because there was no Judgment, he was waiting on nothing. Various eyes looked through the back oval window at his situation, some with considerable reverence, like the boy from the zoo, and some only to see what they could see... Then a woman with two little boys on either side of her stopped and looked in, grinning. After a second, she pushed the boys out of view and indicated that she would climb in and keep him company for a while, but she couldn't get through the glass and finally she went off.

Related Characters: The Woman (with the two little boys), Enoch Emory, Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel falls asleep in his car and has a nightmare that centers on the final Judgment and the judging eyes of those around him. At the beginning of his nightmare, he is trapped in a coffin, an old fear that has haunted him since, as a young boy, he watched most of his family being buried, one by one. In this nightmare there is no Judgment, and this lack of Judgment seems to strike Hazel not as a sign of his freedom from sin, but rather as an invitation to infinite limbo, trapped forever with no hope of escape.

The eyes that look into his coffin, who may also be peering into the car where he sleeps, represent the many townspeople who view Hazel as an eccentric outsider – people with whom Hazel has tried and failed to form any connection. Enoch is mentioned, but only as "the boy from

the zoo," revealing Hazel's casual attitude toward him. By directing Enoch's reverent gaze at Hazel behind the glass of his car window, O'Connor suggests that Hazel should be identified in some way with the small, shrunken mummy in the glass case of the museum. Hazel is on display, an oddity from a bygone era, not at home in the modern world – a vessel of spiritual power that is misunderstood and under appreciated. The woman with two boys, though, appreciates what he has to offer, in a lewd sense, desperate for an animal connection that frightens him most of all.

"Who is that that says it's your conscience?" he cried, looking around with a constricted face as if he could smell the particular person who thought that. "Your conscience is a trick," he said, "it don't exist though you may think it does, and if you think it does, you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you."

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel preaches to the few people who stand and watch him, denying the existence of a conscience. He wants desperately to escape the influence of his own conscience, instilled by his religious upbringing, which led him to see sin as a deep stain that could never be removed except by the blood of a nightmarish Christ. Ironically, no one in the town of Taulkinham seems at all bothered by matters of conscience, aside from Hazel himself; nearly all of the townspeople he encounters follow an un-self-conscious, instinctive lifestyle that never dwells in the dark guilt that Hazel cannot help but feel, even as he preaches against it so intensely. The locals, by contrast, deceive easily and consume lustfully with no qualms whatsoever.

There is also a foreshadowing of Solace Layfield in these words, the man whom Hoover Shoats hires as Hazel's impersonator. Layfield becomes like a "face in the mirror" or a shadow to Hazel, showing him the faults and self-deceptions he refuses to see otherwise until, finally, Hazel makes the decision to run him down, destroying his double in an unsuccessful attempt to kill his own conscience.

Then he slid his legs under the cover by her and sat there as if he were waiting to remember one more thing. She was breathing very quickly. "Take off your hat, king of the beasts," she said gruffly and her hand came up behind his head and snatched the hat off and sent it flying across the room in the dark.

Related Characters: Sabbath Lily Hawks / The Young Girl (speaker), Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel finally gives in to Sabbath's sexual advances, after escaping them first with obliviousness, and then conscious resistance. Sabbath is persistent in her desire for Hazel, as she chooses him as a replacement for her father, Asa, who is leaving soon.

Hazel resists, still, subconsciously, even after having made the decision to get in bed with Sabbath. He proceeds slowly, step by step, as she waits with impatience, and is distant and controlled, in direct contrast to her heavy breathing. This sort of passionate behavior is not natural to him, and he has to force himself to betray his spiritual nature to follow the animal instinct he has claimed to believe in. He succeeded, once, with Mrs. Watts, but quickly realized it was not a sustainable choice. Now he has been worn down, and is surrendering again in an effort to sustain his belief that sin cannot exist. When she removes his hat, the last part of his clothing left, Sabbath removes a symbol of the spiritual and reveals the animal, hailing him as "king of the beasts." This is what Sabbath wants – to teach Hazel how to follow his instincts without guilt – but it is clearly still a struggle for him to reach that point.

The child in front of him finished and stepped aside and left him facing the ape, who took his hand with an automatic motion. It was the first hand that had been extended to Enoch since he had come to the city. It was warm and soft. For a second he only stood there, clasping it. Then he began to stammer. "My name is Enoch Emery," he mumbled...
The star leaned slightly forward and a change came in his eyes: an ugly pair of human ones moved closer and squinted at Enoch from behind the celluloid pair. "You go to hell," a surly voice inside the ape-suit said, low but distinctly, and the hand was jerked away.

Related Characters: Gonga the Gorilla, Enoch Emory (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Enoch waits in line to meet Gonga the Gorilla, an experience he sees as his divine reward for having followed his wise blood's commands so far. He plans to insult Gonga, an idea that gives him great pleasure – but when he feels the warm hand extended toward him, the first he has felt since arriving in Taulkinham, his loneliness takes over, and he decides to make a friend instead. Enoch's quest for connection reaches a climax here, then, as he reaches out to Gonga and is rejected by the man behind the mask, who tells him to "go to hell."

The man's ugly eyes emerge from the depths of the ape suit, which seems to have convinced Enoch he was speaking with a real ape until this very moment; Enoch feels real fear while waiting in line, taken in by the illusion just as much as the small children who wait with him. The revelation that Gonga is a man shocks Enoch, who reels at the collapse of a lie he has believed all this time. He vows revenge, having suffered the deepest rejection possible.

> The entire possibility of this came from the advantage of having a car—of having something that moved fast, in privacy, to the place you wanted to be. He looked out the window at the Essex. It sat high and square in the pouring rain. He didn't notice the rain, only the car; if asked he would not have been able to say it was raining.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel clings to the hope of escape from destiny that his car represents, at the moment when he feels most trapped, having begun his relationship with Sabbath Hawks. He is desperate to leave this place, this town, where he has only ended up circling closer to the religious destiny he had hoped to avoid. This desperate hope fills his whole mind, blocking out even any awareness he has of the rain pouring just outside.

Hazel's car is a symbol of free will, and he sees it as a beautiful, precious vehicle capable of anything – in spite of the many voices that speak to the contrary, pointing out that it is in reality a cheap, broken-down, ugly clunker that is lucky to move at all. He is blinded by what it represents, by his desperation, and still unable to see that in fact both the car, and any notion of escape or free will, are doomed to fail.

> "I knew when I first seen you you were mean and evil," a furious voice behind him said. " I seen you wouldn't let nobody have nothing. I seen you were mean enough to slam a baby against a wall. I seen you wouldn't never have no fun or let anybody else because you didn't want nothing but Jesus!" He turned and raised his arm in a vicious gesture, almost losing his balance in the door. Drops of rain water were splattered over the front of the glasses and on his red face and here and there they hung sparkling from the brim of his hat. "I don't want nothing but the truth!" he shouted, "and what you see is the truth and I've seen it!"

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes, Sabbath Lily Hawks / The Young Girl (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, a dramatic confrontation between Hazel and Sabbath erupts when, after their first night together, she finds the shrunken mummy that Enoch has stolen from the park's museum and brings it to him, cradling it like the Madonna with Child. Hazel had been preparing his escape, gazing longingly at his car, when she entered the room, and he slammed the small figure against the wall in his rage. He feels trapped, desperate to escape the destiny crashing down around him, and Sabbath finds just the right words to stoke his greatest fear; by telling him that she knew as soon as they met that he would "never have no fun" because he "didn't want nothing but Jesus," she confirms that all of this work he has done to distance himself from his spiritual destiny is false and futile.

Hazel, isolating himself again from any human connection, rejects her diagnosis of his inner desire for Jesus, and turns instead toward the truth as his ultimate goal. He is more deeply moved here than we have ever seen him, clinging to the truth as an excuse while remaining oblivious to the truth

of the real world around him, nearly falling out the open door onto the wet ground below.

> No gorilla in existence, whether in the jungles of Africa or California, or in New York City in the finest apartment in the world, was happier at that moment than this one, whose god had finally rewarded it.

Related Characters: Enoch Emory

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Enoch strolls through the woods in Gonga's gorilla costume, having murdered its previous occupant and buried his own clothing. He has been completely transfigured into an animal – arguably, the state to which he has always felt most drawn. For Enoch, this transformation is a moment of perfect, religious joy, the completion of a quest to find his destiny that led him down many unexpected paths, as he followed the command of his wise blood, driven by instinct to this new form. He is perfectly happy in this moment, having achieved religious perfection in a way opposite to the intellectual, guilt-ridden, spiritual path walked so laboriously by Hazel Motes.

By comparing Enoch, as a gorilla, to other gorillas in "the jungles of Africa or California, or in New York City in the finest apartment in the world," O'Connor is taking on the somewhat childish, and perhaps even mentally deranged perspective of Enoch, using his inability to distinguish between man and gorilla as a surprisingly effective means of questioning the actual difference between the two.

Chapter 13 Quotes

> "You shut up," Haze said, leaning his head closer to hear the confession.
> "Told where his still was and got five dollars for it," the man gasped.
> "You shut up now," Haze said.
> "Jesus..." the man said.
> "Shut up like I told you to now," Haze said.
> "Jesus hep me," the man wheezed.
> Haze gave him a hard slap on the back and he was quiet. He leaned down to hear if he was going to say anything else but he wasn't breathing any more.

Related Characters: Solace Layfield, Hazel 'Haze' Motes (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Haze kneels over the dying Solace Layfield, the man hired by Hoover Shoats to impersonate him, after having run Solace down with his car. Even after having committed murder, in a new attempt to refuse the calling of his soul and reject the truth about his destiny that seeing Layfield made all too obvious for him, Hazel is thrust as ever against his will into the role of a preacher, forced to hear the dying man's confession.

Full of contradiction still, though, Hazel leans in to hear what Layfield has to say even as he warns him to shut up. Hazel has rejected the whole concept of confession, based in ideas of sin and redemption that he associates with the horrible, haunting guilt of his childhood. But now, faced with the dying Layfield, he cannot help but perform his natural role as a confessor. This continues until, anticlimactically, Hazel ushers the pitiful Layfield into death with a hard slap on the back, stopping his mouth once and for all.

> Haze followed him around, telling him what it was right to believe. He said it was not right to believe anything you couldn't see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth. He said he had only a few days ago believed in blasphemy as the way to salvation, but that you couldn't even believe in that because then you were believing in something to blaspheme. As for the Jesus who was reported to have been born at Bethlehem and crucified on Calvary for man's sins, Haze said, He was too foul a notion for a sane person to carry in his head... he began to curse and blaspheme Jesus in a quiet but intense way but with such conviction that the boy paused from his work to listen.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Hazel berates the gas station attendant with his usual tirade on the nonexistence of Christ, but with his angry speech only continues to emphasize the depth of those beliefs he wants desperately to escape. Totally

unprompted by the attendant, Hazel launches into his monologue about truth and religion, but his obsessive denial of Christianity has begun to collapse on itself. He has begun to realize, in just the last few days, that blasphemy cannot be the way to the salvation because you can't believe in blasphemy without "believing in something to blaspheme."

Hazel almost seems, in this moment, to be taking a step toward self-awareness, realizing that the truth of his crusade against religion is actually an obsession with redemption and sin, that in attempting to run away from his destiny he only circles back around from the other side. This self-awareness vanishes, though, as, just after warning the boy against blasphemy, Hazel begins to blaspheme with such intensity that the boy pauses in his work to listen. Hazel is incapable of recognizing the hypocrisy of his speech, even as he turns from one argument to another in the course of a single tirade.

> "People have quit doing it," she repeated. "What do you do it for?"
> "I'm not clean," he said.
> She stood staring at him, unmindful of the broken dishes at her feet. "I know it," she said after a minute, "you got blood on that night shirt and on the bed. You ought to get you a washwoman…"
> "That's not the kind of clean," he said.
> "There's only one kind of clean, Mr. Motes," she muttered.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes, Mrs. Flood (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mrs. Flood discovers Haze's self-imposed penance, seeing him in his room with barbed wire wrapped underneath his bloody shirt. The simple Mrs. Flood, who is not in the least spiritually inclined, cannot comprehend Haze's decision to punish himself for being unclean, fixating instead on the literal mess that his blood has caused. As far as Mrs. Flood is concerned, there really is no kind of clean outside of the literal.

Mrs' Flood's blissful ignorance of sin and guilt is in many ways the animal approach to living that Hazel tried so hard to adopt, but his spiritual destiny would never allow him to forget his conscience, formed by a deeply religious upbringing with an emphasis on redemption. Now, just as Hazel was never able to truly understand the un-self-conscious living of Ms. Watts or Mrs. Flood, Mrs. Flood finds herself unable to understand Hazel's spiritual obsession.

> She had never observed his face so composed and she grabbed his hand and held it to her heart. It was resistless and dry. The outline of a skull was plain under his skin and the deep burned eye sockets seemed to lead into the dark tunnel where he had disappeared. She leaned closer and closer to his face, looking deep into them, trying to see how she had been cheated or what had cheated her, but she couldn't see anything. She shut her eyes and saw the pin point of light but so far away that she could not hold it steady in her mind. She felt as if she were blocked at the entrance of something. She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light.

Related Characters: Hazel 'Haze' Motes, Mrs. Flood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mrs. Flood stares into Hazel's eyes after he has passed away, brought back from the winter storm by a pair of policemen who accidentally kill him en route. Mrs. Flood has become fascinated by the distance that separates her from Hazel, by his perspective on the world which is so foreign and inscrutable to her, and now that he is dead this distance is all the greater, drawing her in still further so that she holds his hand to her heart. The outline of a skull in his face, a sort of Memento Mori, is a reminder of the ephemerality of life and the closeness of death, which Hazel sought out so determinedly.

Determined to bridge the gap between them and understand the secret that gives Hazel the composure and conviction she sees in him now, Mrs. Flood closes her eyes; Hazel has already told her that one sees more acutely when one is blind, a claim he makes literal by blinding himself to the world in order to see inside himself more clearly. With the focus that this gives her, she is able to see what is perhaps the image of Hazel's soul passing on into the afterlife, peaceful and distant, leaving the world and its

struggles behind forever.

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.

CHAPTER 1

The protagonist, a young man named Hazel Motes, sits in a train car across from a slightly grotesque-looking a woman. The woman, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, attempts to talk to Hazel, asking him if he is going home. He ignores her, but she begins to make observations about him: he is wearing a new, blue suit, a stiff **hat** like a country preacher's, and the army duffel bag at his feet suggests that he is returning from the war.

Already there is a sense that Hazel is set apart, isolated from the people around him. Since the reader is introduced to Hazel through the perspective of Mrs. Hitchcock, there is an opportunity to observe those parts of him – his hat, and stiff demeanor – that others read as a sign that he is a preacher. O'Connor also registers the importance of the idea of a longed-for home.

Hazel continues to stare down the corridor at the train porter, and Mrs. Hitchcock is disturbed by the intensity of Hazel's pecan-shell eyes, and the "insistent" outline of a skull under his skin. She reads the price tag still on his suit, and continues to stare into Hazel's eyes, making one more attempt at conversation before he leaves to talk with the porter.

Mrs. Hitchcock is the first in a series of characters who are struck with confusion when confronted with the strange, obsessive intensity of Hazel Motes. He is an outsider in their world, and the skull imagery suggests a link to death and a harsh spirituality that transcends Mrs. Hitchcock's petty focus on the suit's price tag.

Hazel tries to talk to the porter (who is black) about Eastrod, his hometown, since he is convinced that he knows the porter from home. The porter says he is from Chicago, but Hazel doesn't believe him. Hazel returns to his seat and thinks of Eastrod, before Mrs. Hitchcock interrupts to repeat her question about his destination. He tells her "sourly" that he is not going home. She takes this as invitation to talk about her trip to Florida, but Hazel quickly loses interest. He only reveals that he is headed to Taulkinham to "do some things [he] never [has] done before."

The isolated Hazel searches for a connection to his hometown of Eastrod, though his intense and confrontational manner turns people away. His stated quest – to do something he has never done before – demonstrates a level of purpose and engagement with life's bigger questions, and with his own personal development, that goes beyond the simple small talk of Mrs. Hitchcock.

Mrs. Hitchcock continues to engage Hazel in small talk, but he cuts her off to tell her about the porter's supposed "lie." Mrs. Hitchcock starts to tell Hazel about her nephews, but he cuts her off to ask if she thinks she's been redeemed. He repeats himself sharply when she fails to answer at first. She blushes, says yes, and then suggests they go to the dining car.

Hazel is confrontational, revealing for the first of many times a deep anger wrapped up in the question of redemption, as well as a hatred for liars. The divide between him and Mrs. Hitchcock continues to widen, as he firmly positions himself as an outsider.

They wait in line for half an hour, with Hazel staring silently at the wall while Mrs. Hitchcock talks with another woman about her sister's husband's job. At the front of the line, a steward with greased black hair "like a crow" beckons to Mrs. Hitchcock and the woman, but sends Hazel back. Hazel reddens and tries at first to leave, then ends up seated alone with three young women "dressed like parrots," lurching awkwardly to their table.

Hazel's awkwardness and bristling hostility in the face of a world where he feels always out of place are in full view here. Mrs. Hitchcock's babble feels petty and small, and the actions of the steward and the young women further isolate Hazel. O'Connor makes a point of emphasizing the animalistic aspects of these characters, adding to the sense of the grotesque in the novel, and also contrasting to the spiritual-minded Hazel Motes.

Hazel sits, "glum and intense," not removing his **hat**, and the women laugh at him when he orders improperly. They are smoking, and Hazel tenses as one woman, with a "bold game-hen expression" blows smoke in his face. Hazel cracks, telling her that if *she*'s been redeemed, he wouldn't want to be. He continues, insisting that he wouldn't believe in Jesus even if he existed on this train with them. "Who said you had to?" the woman replies. Hazel eats angrily and self-consciously, while the women watch. When he finishes, Hazel tries to pay, but the waiter purposefully stays away, winking at the women, who are enjoying his discomfort.

Hazel's hat is a symbol of his outsider status, and of the spiritual calling that separates him from the animal actions of the people around him. The women, again compared to birds, humiliate the bitter Hazel, whose insistence that he doesn't believe in Jesus or redemption falls on deaf ears – a sign of what is to come in the novel. This world of creature-like characters seems united against the overly serious Hazel, mocking his atheistic sincerity, strange habits, and austere appearance.

When he finally escapes the dining car, Hazel tries again to confront the porter, but the porter ignores him. Hazel wants to get into his upper berth to lie down, but he needs the porter for this. Hazel bumps into a half-blind Mrs. Hitchcock in the hallway, her face framed by curlers like "toadstools." When Hazel finally finds the porter again, he tries to tell him about their Eastrod connection once more, but the porter insists that he isn't who Hazel thinks he is, annoyed.

The grotesque features of the bumbling Mrs. Hitchcock are typical of O'Connor's characters, and the idea of blindness will recur throughout the novel. Hazel continues to pursue his connection to home through the impatient porter, convinced that he is lying. He finds no one sympathetic to his plight.

Hazel climbs the porter's ladder into the upper berth, which is low and dark, but he wishes the darkness were absolute. Half asleep, he feels like he is in a **coffin**. Hazel remembers the first coffin he ever saw, which contained his grandfather, a fierce country preacher. He remembers being certain, watching his grandfather in the open coffin, that he wouldn't let it close, and then being surprised when it did. Hazel remembers his younger brothers' coffins, one tiny, one about half-size. Asleep now, he dreams of his father's funeral, and the way that his body, pressed onto his knees by his own wish, had flattened out into the coffin when they dropped it into the grave.

The darkness of the bunk foreshadows the dark expanse of Hazel's mind as imagined by Mrs. Flood at the end of the novel. Hazel's memories reveal a deep fear of death, and a basic confusion about how a life could really end. At the same time, they emphasize the lonely, tragic life he has lived, watching so many of his family members die. This begins to explain his seriousness, and also the difficulty that he has in relating to other people. His grandfather – the country preacher – is a major influence on his view of religion.

Waking up, Hazel's memories of death continue. Eastrod, his hometown, is empty now. He left for the war when he was eighteen. At first he had planned to shoot himself in the foot to avoid being enlisted, since a preacher—which he initially aspired to be, like his grandfather—didn't need two good feet. Hazel remembers his grandfather, shouting to the assembled crowd from atop his **car**. His grandfather would single out Hazel, who resembled him, in the crowd, and ask everyone to consider the fact that Jesus would have died ten million deaths even for a "mean, unthinking, sinful" boy like Hazel. Jesus would have Hazel, no matter what.

Here O'Connor provides a further window into Hazel's past, revealing his youthful plan to become a preacher, and also the fact that his hometown is now deserted, leaving him alone in the world. Hazel was clearly serious and morbid even as a teen, and the image of his grandfather on the hood of a car will recur when Hazel takes up preaching in Taulkinham. His grandfather's targeting of Hazel as dirty and sinful begins to explain his angry rejection of the idea of sin and redemption.

The young Hazel already held a deep conviction that he would be a preacher, and that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin. Jesus, in his mind, was a dark ragged figure darting between trees, who wanted to draw him out onto the water where he would drown once his faith was tested. All Hazel wanted was to stay and work in Eastrod, but he decided to go into the army for just four months, confident he could emerge uncorrupted. He stayed for four years.

Hazel's conception of Jesus is different from the usual one portrayed by Christianity. For Hazel, Jesus is a dark figure that haunts his childhood, so that Hazel's desire to be a preacher comes more from an urge to escape Jesus than to become closer to him. This glimpse into Hazel's past—the plans he had and the ways they went awry—also reveals an early chapter in the struggle between free will and fate that governs the novel.

In the army, Hazel had only a black Bible and his mother's reading glasses from home—glasses that tired his eyes so he was not tempted to read too much. He looked forward, at first, to resisting the temptations of the army, thus affirming his purity. When Hazel first had the chance to do so, however, his righteousness had little effect on the soldiers who were inviting him to a brothel. He told them he was from Eastrod, and wouldn't have his soul corrupted by the government or foreign lands. They told him he had no soul, and left.

These small tokens and links to Hazel's past emphasize the importance of his home to his development. The tiring glasses are a darkly comic reflection of the type of religious background Hazel comes from – he is more influenced by the fiery speeches of his grandfather than any reading of the Bible. He is isolated from his fellow soldiers by his righteous seriousness, and his spiritual conviction has little effect on their animal desire.

Hazel was deeply attracted to the idea that he had no soul, and that instead of corruption leading him into evil, it would lead him into nothing. It took a long time for him to be convinced of this though—first he went halfway around the world, and was wounded. The army said they removed the shrapnel from his chest, but Hazel didn't believe them. Later, abroad again, he decided that he had *never* had a soul—his longing for Jesus was really a longing for home. When Hazel was released, still "uncorrupted," he wanted to return to Eastrod. He was still carrying his Bible (which he no longer read) and his mother's glasses.

The interaction with the soldiers introduces to Hazel the idea that humanity is more aligned with the animal than the spiritual – and thus that he has no real soul. This is attractive to Hazel because it contradicts what he has been told over and over again: that he is dirty, sinful, and in need of redemption. Over the course of the war he comes to accept the idea that there is no soul, and that he is clean because he could never be dirty. Still, he clings to the Bible that represents home.

Hazel took the first train home he could find, and bought himself the suit and **hat** along the way, stuffing his army uniform into a trashbox. When at last he arrived in Eastrod, it was evening, and he didn't realize at first that his house was only an empty shell, overgrown with weeds. By the light of a burning envelope, Hazel explored the house. He fell asleep on the kitchen floor, where a board fell on his head and cut his face. The only remnant of his family was a chifforobe (a wardrobe with drawers) of his mother's. Hazel tied it up, and left a note warning anyone interested in stealing the "shiffer-robe" that they would be hunted down and killed.

Hazel, a natural outsider, never felt at home with the camaraderie of the army, and sheds his uniform here without hesitation. There is no connection waiting for him at home, either – his abandoned house shows us how alone he truly is, and even this space seems hostile to him, as boards drop comically onto his head. He feels fiercely defensive of his former home, though, and can't fully accept that it is empty, as demonstrated by his threatening note to potential intruders.

Hazel reflects that his mother's ghost will feel more at peace knowing the chifforobe is guarded. He remembers her worried face, glimpsing it through the crack in her **coffin** as they shut it on her when he was sixteen. As with his father, grandfather, and brothers, Hazel was convinced until the last moment that she would spring out and escape when the coffin was closed. Hazel awakens from his half-conscious memory, desperate to escape from the coffin-like sleeping berth, but he has been locked in. The porter stands outside, unwilling to let him out. Hazel begs him, saying "Jesus," but the porter responds, triumphantly, that "Jesus been a long time gone."

Hazel's instinct to defend the chifforobe comes from a sense of duty to his family—as does his religious guilt, it seems. This guilt is amplified by the fear and loneliness that results from watching them all die, and seeing the coffin shut upon them once and for all. This fear makes him desperate to escape the bunk, but he has already alienated the porter, only person who could help him. Coffin's thus ultimately symbolize Hazel's harsh, spiritual-minded view of life—when he thinks of his family, he only thinks of their deaths, and when he thinks of life, he is only concerned with issues of sin, the soul, and truth. Hazel's invocation of Jesus here is another sign that he has not escaped religion as fully as he lets on.

CHAPTER 2

Hazel arrives in Taulkinham at six the next evening, after having been left behind by the train. He had run after the departing train, but his **hat** flew off, and he had to stop to retrieve it. In the city, he is struck by the many electric signs, and goes to the men's toilet to find a private place to sit. Hazel enters a stall marked "Welcome" and discovers, written on the stall, an address for Mrs. Leora Watts, "the friendliest bed in town," and signed "Brother." Hazel copies down the address and leaves the station in search of a taxi.

Hazel again seems beset upon by the world, an isolated oddball out of sync with those around him. He could not abandon his hat, a symbol of his spiritual calling and separation from the more animalistic people around him. Hazel is overwhelmed in their world, and finds refuge in the bathroom. His discovery of Mrs. Watts' address seems destined, as if some invisible hand were guiding his path. At the same time it also represents a grotesque intrusion of the animal connected with the spiritual (the note is signed "brother," usually a religious epithet.

In the taxi, the cigar-smoking driver squints at Hazel in the mirror, recognizing Leora Watts' address and confused about why he would want to go there—"she don't usually have no preachers for company," he explains. Hazel frowns, telling the driver that he is not a preacher, but the driver persists, telling Hazel that the **hat**, and something in his face, make him look like a preacher. Hazel clutches the hat and, expressionless, insists that he doesn't believe in anything.

The driver's smoke links him to the cruel, animalistic young women smoking in the dining car. His insistence that Hazel is a preacher – which he reads from his hat, and something "spiritual" in his face – shows that the world's view of Hazel is different from what he would like to be. Hazel is enraged, withdrawing into the blank expression that characterizes his moments of anger, and steadfastly denying the religious destiny others see.

The driver reassures Hazel that even preachers aren't perfect, and that it's okay if he needs to commit sin himself in order to better understand what he is condemning. Hazel gets out of the car, repeating his statement of denial and non-belief. The driver scowls and drives away, disgusted, saying "that's the problem with you preachers… you've all got too good to believe in anything."

This comic misunderstanding further emphasizes the divide between Hazel – who, in an attempt to assert his free will and deny the power that religion has over him, is enraged by being mistaken for a preacher – and the driver, who is frankly unconcerned with the judgment or sin that drives Hazel's anger and guilt.

Hazel looks at the shack that stands before him, peering in at a crack in the shades to find a large white knee. He goes through the unlocked door and looks through a cracked door in the hallway, the only source of light. A sweaty blonde figure, Mrs. Leora Watts, is sitting alone on a white bed, trimming her toenails, dressed in a too-small pink nightgown. She stares at him for a minute, but then goes back to her toenails.

Here again we are reminded just how alone – and also how young and confused – Hazel is, as he stands outside this strange house. He is in search of a home, and his first exploration of the house mirrors the memory of his return to Eastrod. The grotesque, animal Mrs. Watts is almost a fantastical figure for the inexperienced Hazel.

Hazel enters the room, and wanders about, examining its grungy contents, his senses "stirred to the limit." He sits down on the far corner of the bed and begins to run his hand along the sheet. Mrs. Watts seems happy to see him, and her tongue emerges to moisten her lip, but she says nothing. Hazel puts his hand on her heavy foot, and she smiles widely, revealing yellowing, gapped teeth. She asks Hazel whether he is "hunting something."

The intense tension of this moment reveals Hazel's inexperience and desire for connection, and O'Connor's description of the pair's body movements conjures up an image of two animals in a cage. That he touches her first on the foot is both comic and a sign of his discomfort. Mrs. Watts seems to revel in this discomfort.

Hazel almost leaps through the window, but Leora Watts' grip is firm. She pulls him closer, and he carefully controls his request for "the usual business." Mrs. Watts responds with a simple "make yourself at home." They stare at each other tensely for almost a minute, and then Hazel says, in a high voice, that he is "no goddamn preacher." Mrs. Watts smirks just slightly, and tickles his face, reassuring him that "Momma don't mind if you ain't a preacher."

His instincts urge him to flee, but Hazel steels himself, his presence here driven more by some sort of spiritual quest to assert his free will and deny the idea of sin than any lustful desire for pleasure. Again, this assertion falls on deaf ears, as Mrs. Watts brushes aside his talk of preachers to get down to the usual business.

CHAPTER 3

On Hazel's second night in the city, he walks around town past the storefronts, contemplating the stars while people shop late. Hazel's shadow mingles with others on the sidewalk, and his blue suit looks purple in the light of the signs. Eventually he stops in front of a salesman selling potato peelers on the street, performing live demonstrations of his device while addressing a crowd of passersby. For a volunteer, the man singles out a fox-faced boy named Enoch Emery.

Hazel is preoccupied with the stars – typically a home of the spiritual – while those around him are stuck in the commercial world of neon light. Here Hazel encounters for the first time O'Connor's second protagonist, Enoch. It's notable that Enoch is first presented as an eager, animal-like boy. The street salesman and his crowd are reminiscent of the crowds that gathered to hear Hazel's grandfather.

The salesman's demonstration is then interrupted by a tall, thin man dressed all in black and with a scarred face, who is followed by a young girl. Hazel stares at them. He is oblivious to the salesman, who tries to speak to Hazel, until Enoch punches his arm. Hazel explains that he has no wife or "dear old mother" to give the potato peeler to, and the man jokes that perhaps he needs one just to keep him company. Enoch finds this hilarious, and fumbles for change in his pocket to buy himself a peeler.

Here, the characters of Asa and Sabbath Hawks are introduced – although O'Connor doesn't name them yet, thus building a sense of mystery around the dark figures. The salesman's insult cuts Hazel where it hurts most, reminding him of his lost home and family, but in the absurd context of a confrontation over a potato peeler. Enoch is portrayed as simple-minded and easily amused.

Meanwhile, the man in black, who is blind, begs from the assembled crowd, threatening to preach, and asking for a nickel if they won't repent. The salesman tries to drive him away, as he sees the crowd dispersing, but the blind preacher ignores him. The girl follows behind, handing out pamphlets. Hazel grabs one of these, which reads "Jesus Calls You," and tears it into confetti. The salesman goes into a rage, but then controls his anger when he sees people watching. Hazel drops the scraps of pamphlet to the ground, and then looks up to see the young girl staring at him, shocked.

The street preacher, although he seems equally concerned with begging for money, immediately catches Hazel's attention—whereas no one else in the crowd seems at all moved, aside from the salesmen whose pitch is being disrupted. Hazel ripping up the pamphlet is a deliberate, violent denial of the power religion has over him, but at the same time the pamphlets clearly affect Hazel more than anyone else there. Hazel's future connection to the girl is also foreshadowed here.

Enoch is still trying to get the salesman's attention to buy a peeler, but the salesman is still angrily engaged with the blind preacher. The young girl defiantly tries to buy a peeler, but she doesn't have enough money. Neither does Enoch, and the salesman rejects his bartering. As the blind man and girl walk away, Hazel impulsively buys a peeler, paying too much, and then runs after the two, with Enoch following him, looking like a "friendly hound dog."

Enoch's desire for a potato peeler and his interaction with the salesman are typical of his childish character. Sabbath's proud defiance of the salesman associates her with Hazel's disdain for the world, in a way, and this may be what drives him to follow her. Enoch's animal nature is clear in O'Connor's description. He is almost Hazel's opposite, but at the same time he too seeks connection, and (like Hazel) goes about it in a confrontational and unsuccessful way.

Enoch tries to make conversation with Hazel, bragging that he is only eighteen, has been in town for two months, and already works for the city. Hazel is barely responsive, however, and stays focused on the pair they are following. Enoch tries to engage him about religion, telling him about his experience staying for four weeks at the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy, but Hazel's focus is absolute—he even crosses a street in front of passing cars, causing a policeman to blow his whistle and stop them. Hazel doesn't engage the policeman, who makes a racist joke about the traffic signal to the assembled onlookers. Enoch steps in, telling the cop (dishonestly) that he was born and raised in Taulkinham, and that he will take responsibility for the newcomer, Hazel, who has by now already left.

The collision of these two opposite types – one overly serious, spiritual in spite of himself, dark, and brooding, and the other talkative, earnest, animal, instinctual, and shallow – is comic, certainly, but there is also a strange kinship between them. Both are outsiders, rejected by the world or somehow ill at ease within it. The racist policeman adds to the sense that the people in the city are grotesque, and driven by low, animal impulses. Enoch's lie is an attempt to assert ownership of, or connection to, both a place (Taulkinham) and a person (Hazel), when neither seems to care for him at all.

Enoch catches Hazel up, and suggests they go buy a soda. Hazel dismisses Enoch, but he continues to follow him, chattering about his experience with the Welfare woman who took him away from his father and trapped him in her brick house to learn about Jesus. A man jostles Enoch in the street and Enoch growls at him, to which the man responds with a vicious snarl.

Enoch's persistence stems from a desperate loneliness, like a lost dog, and the snarling exchange with the man who bumps him reinforces this impression. He too has a dark past with religion, which is only offered to us in bits and pieces. Hazel is occupied with his quest to find Asa Hawks.

Enoch jogs to catch up to Hazel, continuing his story. The Welfare woman sent him to the Bible Academy after he tried to run away. After four weeks Enoch ran away from the Academy as well, but was found and returned to the woman's house. He was desperate to leave, so he prayed to Jesus to show him a way out short of killing her. Inspiration struck, and one morning he crept up on the woman in bed with no pants on. He pulled the sheet off of her, giving her a "heart attact." Then he left.

The dark comedy of this situation—in which Enoch is trapped in the home of a smothering woman and, through prayer, finds this unusual means of escape—comes from the fact that Enoch uses his animal instinct, in connection with a faith in something higher, to overcome the serious, menacing religion of the woman and the Rodemill Bible Academy. There is a kind of purity, or innocence, in his animal actions.

Enoch is sure that Hazel is a wealthy man and tells him so, but Hazel remains silent. Enoch goes on talking about the city, and how difficult it is to make friends there. They begin to catch up to the blind man and the young girl, who are headed toward a large domed building surrounded by parked cars. Pulling his **hat** forward at an angle, Hazel approaches the blind preacher and stands silently in front of him, leaning in. The blind man tells Hazel that he can smell the sin on his breath, and asks why he has been following them. Hazel leans back and denies that he has been following the preacher, as the young girl stares at him. "I followed her," he says, and thrusts out the peeler.

Enoch is really opening himself up to Hazel, hungry for a connection. Hazel, meanwhile, is preoccupied with the mystery of the blind man and the young girl, clutching his hat as armor almost against the threat he perceives in them – since they represent the religious path he now despises, and the destiny he has thrown away. The blind man's talk of sin is exactly what Hazel most hates about his memory of religion, but he is also drawn to it somehow. His single-minded obsession regarding religion is now focused on these two people.

The young girl rejects the device at first, but the blind man threatens her and she reluctantly takes it from the persistent Hazel. Hazel explains that he followed her to say that he "ain't beholden for none of her fast eye." The girl reacts in anger, explaining to the blind preacher about the pamphlet Hazel tore up. The blind man is still convinced Hazel followed him, saying that he hears the urge for Jesus in his voice.

The blind preacher's insistence that Hazel has followed them because of his "urge for Jesus" only angers Hazel more, since it strikes at the core of the religious destiny he is so strenuously trying to avoid. He continues to deflect by claiming that the girl was eyeing him, and the potato-peeler at the center of the whole scene lends comedy.

Hazel blasphemes, sitting down with his hand on the step near the young girl's sneaker, and muttering "My Jesus," which she takes as evidence that he did not come for the preacher. The blind man laughs, ignoring the girl, and tells Hazel that he can't run from Jesus. Enoch pipes up about the Bible Academy, but everyone ignores him. Hazel insists that he's come halfway around the world since he believed in anything, but the blind man points out that he still followed *him*. He reaches out and puts his hand over Hazel's face. After a second Hazel knocks it away, faintly protesting that the man knows nothing about him.

Hazel's hand near Sabbath's foot echoes the way he sat on the bed beside Mrs. Watts in the previous chapter. He blasphemes, saying "My Jesus," but somehow his blasphemies seem only to reinforce the idea that he can never really escape the importance of religion in his life. Enoch is an outsider here, as usual. Hazel is stubborn in his denial of belief, but the blind man makes a fair point – why is he so obsessed with the street preacher if it is true that he believes in nothing?

Enoch continues to interject, telling everyone that his daddy looks just like Jesus, with long hair and a scar—although he's never seen his mother. The blind man and Hazel continue to ignore him. The young girl steps in and tells a story about a woman who "didn't have nothing but her good looks," who tried to get rid of her baby, eventually strangling it with a pair of stockings, but was forever haunted by its beauty.

Enoch's persistence is ignored, as he is seen as "lower" than this spiritual discussion. The young girl's story is the first in a series that she will tell over the course of the novel about children who haunt their cruel guardians. She clearly has some issues with her own guardian, Asa, and a secret desire for children of her own.

At this point the conversation is interrupted by the large crowd about to exit the building, which the blind man calls his congregation. He distributes pamphlets and splits the four of them into two teams, one for each door, despite the protests of both Hazel and the young girl. Hazel tries to escape, rejecting the blind man's invitation to repent by telling him that he is just as clean as the preacher, that he doesn't believe in sin, and that Jesus doesn't exist. Finally, in frustration, Hazel takes a stack of pamphlets to throw into the bushes. The blind man claims that he can see more than Hazel can, and says that Hazel will have to open his eyes sometime.

Somehow, Hazel – who claims to be steadfastly atheist – finds himself swept into a street preaching operation. He violently rejects this, but his rejection is, as usual, ignored by those around him. Hazel's beliefs are articulated a bit more clearly here, as he specifically targets the idea of sin and guilt. Asa's response—that he, the blind man, can see more than Hazel can—foreshadows what happens at the end of the novel, when Hazel does "open his eyes," in a way—even after Asa is proven to be a fraud.

Against the rush of the crowd, at the top of the large building's steps, Hazel begins to warn people against the preacher waiting for them. In between muttering "My Jesus" over and over, Hazel gives a speech, telling them that they are all clean. He tells them that he is a preacher himself, but a preacher of the truth—that Jesus did not dies to make them clean. Hazel then announces a new church—the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified—which will be free to join. He gets a few glances as the crowd thins out and disappears. Hazel announces to the blind man and the young girl that he doesn't need Jesus, since he has Leora Watts.

In a way Hazel is taking up his destiny by deciding to found this Church without Christ, even though he does it to assert his free will. There is a sense that he is finding what he was "meant to do" by coming here. He feels compelled to defend the passersby from the ideas of sin that were so harmful to him in the past, and to offer them truth instead—not out of any sense of benevolence or philanthropy, but rather as a way of fiercely asserting what he sees as truth and attacking the religion he wants to escape. Hazel announces defiantly that, in place of Jesus and the spiritual, he has taken up Leora Watts – symbol of the human, and the animal.

Hazel starts to leave the building behind, but the voice of the blind man stops him. The man shouts out his name—Asa Hawks—to make it easier for Hazel to follow him next time. Hawks yells at Hazel to repent, and is nearly hit by a car in the street. Hazel continues on, only turning at the sound of Enoch's footsteps behind him. He tries to lose Enoch, walking quickly, but Enoch follows doggedly on, explaining that he knows no one in this city, and that Hazel looks familiar. He says that his daddy made him come to the city, and he begins to cry as he chases Hazel along the street.

Asa Hawks' confidence that Hazel will return is a reminder that religion seems like Hazel's destiny, and he is perhaps not in control of his actions. Hawks' near miss with the car is an echo of Hazel's single-minded crossing of the street a few pages earlier, when he was almost hit—and also a foreshadowing of the car accident to come. Hawks and Hazel are similar in other ways, too: both fanatical, unconcerned with the world around them, sharp, and stubborn. Enoch's dogged pursuit of Hazel, desperate to the point of tears, is again reminiscent of a lost dog in search of its master. He is alone here, just like Hazel.

Enoch half-invites Hazel to a brothel, but as they turn up Leora Watts' street, Hazel finally stops and confronts him, telling Enoch that he already has a woman, and that he's going to visit her. Enoch doesn't believe him, and offers to pay him back for the brothel next week—from his wages as a guard at the city zoo. When Hazel continues to reject him, Enoch tells Hazel that he isn't friendly, and that he's known since he first saw him that Hazel has no woman, has no one but Jesus.

Just as he did with Asa, Hazel uses his connection to Leora Watts – tentative though it is – as an excuse to escape from Enoch. Like Asa, Enoch doesn't quite believe that this serious, spiritual-seeming figure could "have a woman." In fact, his final insult to Hazel – that he has no one but Jesus – is further proof that, to the people around him, Hazel seems destined for religion.

Hazel turns in toward Mrs. Watts' house, ignoring Enoch. Enoch then reveals that he has the potato peeler box. He says that the young girl gave it to him and asked him to bring Hazel back to their house. Enoch says that Hazel might think he has "wiser **blood**" than anyone else, but he doesn't—it is he, Enoch, who does. Hazel stands, rigid and silent, on Mrs. Watts' steps, and then hurls the stack of pamphlets at Enoch's chest, knocking his mouth open. Enoch turns and runs away.

Hazel escapes from Enoch's accusation—that he is tied to Jesus by destiny—by taking refuge in the animal instincts of Mrs. Watts. Enoch's claim to the "wise blood" of the title is a sign of what is to come. Hazel hits Enoch with the stack of religious pamphlets, which he is still carrying for some reason, rejecting Enoch's persistent, dog-like attempts at friendship.

Hazel's experience with Leora Watts had "not been very successful." It was the first time he had slept with a woman, and afterward "he was like someone washed ashore on her." He is not sure how she will receive him, but he opens the door. When Mrs. Watts sees him, she laughs. Hazel puts on his **hat** before entering, but takes it off when it knocks against the electric light. He moves around her room, examining things, and then comes to sit on the edge of the bed, desperately nervous. Mrs. Watts knowingly removes her nightgown, and reaches over to take the "Jesus-seeing hat," posing in it on the bed. Hazel stares, makes "three quick noises that were laughs," and then leaps to turn off the light and take off his clothes.

The previously defiant and proud Hazel is reduced to a pitiful, comic state by Mrs. Watts. His uncertainty is clear, and she laughs at his inexperience and awkwardness. Hazel's hat—his usual shield from the world, and a symbol of the spiritual destiny he denies—is mocked by the nude figure of Mrs. Watts. This is exactly the kind of irreverent, animal action that Hazel most desires, since it blasphemes against his past and what those around him see as his destiny. He turns into an animal himself at the sight of this image, leaping into the arms of Mrs. Watts.

Hazel remembers that when he was small, his father took him to a carnival, where there was a special, higher priced tent to one side. Hazel eventually convinced the barker, who had denied him entry because of his age, to let him in to see this tent. Once inside, Hazel climbed up on a bench to peer over into a **coffin**-like box, where a naked woman was writhing. He then heard his father's voice and fled, hiding in a truck. When he returned home, Hazel could not shake the memory of the woman in the coffin. His mother accused him, saying "What you seen?" When Hazel told her, she hit him with a stick and told him that Jesus died to redeem him, to which Hazel responded, "I never ast him."

Here O'Connor shows us the origins of this conflicted view of sin, sex, and redemption that roils at the core of Hazel. His curiosity, a desire to see more of the world's mysteries, draws him into this tent. Once there, the sight of this animalistic activity, taking place as it does in a coffin—a symbol of death—frightens the young Hazel, who is struck by the hypocrisy of his father and the group of men gathered to watch the naked woman. His mother, a vengeful, strict figure, then reminds him forcefully that he is guilty and indebted to Jesus for his redemption. This is perhaps the beginning of Hazel's rebellion, as he explains that he never wanted Jesus to die for him—he had no choice.

The next morning young Hazel filled his shoes with rocks and walked a mile to the creek as a way of repenting for what he had done. He removed his shoes at the creek and sunk his damaged feet into the sand, waiting for a sign from God, but received none. He then walked a half-mile back with his shoes on before he finally took them off.

Even with the realization that he never wanted Jesus to die for him, Hazel's guilt at seeing the woman is so deep that he takes it upon himself to punish his unclean actions. The young Hazel repents through self-harm, enacting a dark penitence reminiscent of the more extreme Catholic saints—and foreshadowing his self-harm at the novel's end.

CHAPTER 4

Hazel wakes up and carefully extracts himself from Mrs. Watts' bed, having decided to buy a **car**. He has no license, and only fifty dollars, but the thought is fixed in his mind. He scouts through used car lots before they open, ignoring any salesmen, his face fragile and intense beneath his black **hat**. There are no cars to be found for fifty dollars, until Hazel reaches a near-junkyard called Slade's. A boy smoking a cigarette tries to stop him from entering, but Hazel ignores him, having seen a beat-up, rat-colored car that he immediately feels is the one he will buy.

Mrs. Watts has served Hazel so far as an escape and a place to assert his free will, but now he needs a car to fill that same purpose. At the same time that this is a quest for a vehicle of his free will, though, Hazel also seems driven by a force beyond himself – he makes his choice based on a feeling that this car is "the one" Haze; pays no attention to the smoking boy, isolated beneath his dark hat and totally single-minded, immune to distraction.


Cursing, the boy follows Hazel. When Hazel asks to see the owner, the boy claims that *he* is Slade. Hazel examines the **car**: its backseat has been replaced by a wooden board, and there are dark green window shades on the windows. The boy sits nearby, still cursing. When Hazel asks him how much the car costs, he says "Jesus on the cross." Hazel asks again, and they begin to barter, but are interrupted by the arrival of the boy's father, Slade. Slade roars at the boy, sending him scampering and snarling.

The car Hazel has chosen is beaten-down and odd-looking, an unconventional choice that somehow suits this unconventional character. The cursing boy resembles a small animal scampering between the scrap metal, territorial but also somewhat pitiful and helpless. With his cursing, he also serves as a constant reminder of Jesus and the cross, who can never be far away from Hazel.



The elder Slade offers an initial price of seventy-five dollars, which Haze accepts, but the man initiates a negotiation all the same, cutting his offer down to sixty-five. Hazel tries to act calm and roll himself a cigarette, but he drops all of the materials. The man starts discussing race in Detroit, using a common slur for African-Americans, as Hazel offers thirty dollars for the **car**. Hazel kicks the tire, and they settle on fifty. Before they leave the lot, Slade takes Hazel for a test drive with the boy huddled in the backseat. At one point the boy is thrown off the wooden board, and his father "roars" at him. The boy sits silently in his black raincoat, with his cap pulled down almost to his eyes.

This bartering is comic because it illustrates just how uncomfortable Hazel is with the ways of the commercial world – and how proud and stubborn he is. There is an attempt, on the part of Slade, at some kind of masculine connection, but Hazel's dropped cigarette and inept examination of the car make this a silly exercise. The boy huddled in the backseat, frustrated and clothed in black, suffering the abuse of his father with his hat pulled down, is almost a picture of what a sullen young Hazel might have looked like.

Hazel buys the **car** for forty dollars, and buys some gasoline as well, which the boy pours from a gas can, muttering "sweet Jesus" over and over. Hazel asks Slade why the boy won't shut up, to which the father replies that he "never know[s] what ails him." It has been years since Hazel was in a car, and he has trouble getting it started. He tells them he is buying it mostly as a house, and then he releases the brake and drives off crookedly. Slade and the boy watch him.

The way that the boy curses – in a stream of blasphemies – is similar to the way Hazel curses when he feels particularly enraged at the world, and there is a sense that Hazel, too, "never knows what ails" himself. He has a home now, he thinks, in this car – a place to call his own, and one that makes him free. His terrible driving seemingly sabotages this, but he remains confident.

Hazel drives without thinking, unable to stop or even slow down without having to restart the **car**. It has begun to rain. Hazel passes long blocks of uniform houses with "ugly dog" faces, and the windshield wipers make a sound "like two idiots clapping in church." He reaches the highway and accelerates, passing filling stations and red gulleys while the rain begins to leak into his car. At one point he screeches to a halt to let a line of pigs cross the road. Everything seems foreign and familiar, like something he has forgotten.

The car gives Hazel a new way to experience the world, a new freedom of motion, and a new perspective, even if it is clearly in a very bad state. He is disgusted by the "dog faces" of the readymade houses that house the animal-like people of Taulkinham. O'Connor's simile describing the windshield wipers shows that Hazel's frame of reference is still firmly planted in religion, antagonistic though it might be.

Hazel is forced to slow down for a black pick-up truck carrying a mass of wet chickens. He tries to honk his horn, but it doesn't work. The truck slows down further, as if to read a hand-painted white message on a jutting rock that they pass. The message condemns "whoremongers" and blasphemers. Hazel pounds on his horn but with no effect, and when the truck finally passes the sign, he reads "Jesus Saves" at its base.

Hazel's powerlessness as he pounds the faulty horn of his new car, staring up at the dripping chickens, is both comic and a dark sign that his destiny – contained in the religious message on the roadside, which speaks of sin and redemption – cannot be escaped by means of a simple car. Hazel is infuriated.

The **car** is stopped now, and the driver of a long oil truck behind Hazel emerges to get him off the road. Hazel sits silently, staring, until the driver puts his hand on his shoulder, which he rejects, although the driver doesn't seem to hear him. Hazel tells the driver that a whoremonger was already "fallen" from the start, that the sin came before them, and that "Jesus is a trick on n*****s." The driver asks him to move, and Hazel responds that he doesn't have to run from anything because he doesn't believe in anything. He asks the driver where the zoo is, and the driver asks if he escaped from there. Hazel tells him he needs to see someone who works there, and then he starts the car, heading back to town.

Hazel is so moved by the sight of the sign condemning "whoremongers"—a category to which he may belong now, technically, after sleeping with Mrs. Watts—that he becomes blind to the world around him, muttering about the lies at the core of religion, particularly the lie that men are unclean and need Jesus to be redeemed. The driver thinks he is insane, like an animal escaped from the zoo. The zoo is at the center of Hazel's plan to find Enoch, so that Enoch can lead him to Asa Hawks, and Hazel can confront the destiny that seems to be following him everywhere.

CHAPTER 5

Enoch Emery knows upon waking that today he will show someone his secret—the "wise **blood**" he inherited from his daddy told him so. That afternoon Enoch complains as usual to the guard relieving him at the zoo, who is always fifteen minutes late. As he does every day, Enoch goes to the park, where first he hides in the bushes by the pool to watch women swimming. He is shocked by what he sees as the shamelessness of the women, who often come to swim with ripped bathing suits. Enoch goes to the whorehouse occasionally, but he is shocked by these displays out in the open, and goes into the bushes out of a sense of propriety.

This is the first chapter where the perspective begins to follow Enoch, and O'Connor provides a glimpse of the mix of instinct and fate (what he calls "wise blood") that guides his actions. This blood is his inheritance from his father, something beyond his control and that dominates his free will. Enoch is a lonely creature of habit, and in his feelings toward the bathing women display a comic, juvenile mix of prudish shyness and sly desire. He is like an animal in these habits, hiding in the bushes.

The park is at the heart of the city, and the "knowing" in Enoch's **blood** led him there. He is stunned and awed by seeing the city's heart every day, and especially by the mystery he has discovered at its center. This mystery is on display in a glass case, but Enoch knows its dark and terrible secret. He feels that he must show it to someone, but only someone special, someone he will be shown by his wise blood. He is growing impatient, feeling impulses to steal, rob, or rape mounting in him, but he feels that today that special person will come.

The reverence and awe that Enoch feels toward this mystery at the heart of the city is almost religious in nature. We are kept in the dark as to what the mystery might be, adding to the sense of darkness, confusion, and the grotesque. The animal impulses roiling within Enoch are growing more insistent as the chosen person that his "wise blood" is sending to him approaches. He entirely trusts in fate and in his instincts.

Enoch leaves his post and takes the path to the pool. He sees a woman with two little boys approaching. She is one of the regular visitors to the pool, who wears a stained white bathing suit that fits her "like a sack." She is one of Enoch's favorites. He crawls through a dirt tunnel under some abelia bushes, where, red-faced, he peeks out like a devil.

In step with his routine, Enoch heads to the pool. The grotesque figure of the woman arouses Enoch, whose animal nature is on display as he crawls through the dirt under the bushes to leer at the pool. With the devil simile O'Connor stays true to form—religious imagery is never far away.

Enoch thinks of his routine—he never goes immediately to the "dark secret center" of the park. First he goes to the pool, and then to a hotdog stand called The Frosty Bottle, where he harasses the waitress and drinks a chocolate shake. Then he goes to the line of animal cages, which hold a dark fascination for him.

This daily routine carries some significance for Enoch, and serves as a sort of ritual that prepares him for the religious experience of the dark secret. The elements of the routine, though, are trivial, typical of Enoch's animal nature. As usual he desires connection, but goes about it in an antagonistic way, through insults and harassment.

His reverie is interrupted by the sound of the noisy, rat-colored **car** passing back and forth, looking for something. Enoch cranes to see it, and recognizes Hazel emerging stiffly from the car in his suit and **hat**. Hazel sits down on the grass. "Well I'll be dog," Enoch says, and scrambles out of the bushes, his heart racing. On all fours, he stares across the pool at Hazel, who looks as if he is being held there, expressionless, by some invisible hand. As the woman enters the pool, Hazel's head slowly turns to watch her swimming. Enoch stealthily sneaks up behind Hazel, sitting on the slope ten feet above him.

This is the first time O'Connor shows us Hazel from Enoch's perspective. With his beaten-up car and odd hat, and he seems stiff and unwieldy, completely out of place in the park. The dog-like Enoch recognizes that Hazel must be the one chosen by his wise blood, and stalks him like he is hunting prey. Unlike Enoch, Hazel does not hide to watch the woman, suggesting he does not feel the same prudish guilt – but he still seems uncomfortable, as he was around Mrs. Watts.

Hazel and Enoch watch as the woman pulls herself out of the pool, seeing first her "cadaverous" head and sharp teeth, then her large feet and legs as she squats, panting and dripping. She faces them and grins, then moves into a patch of sunlight and removes her bathing cap, revealing short, matted hair. She grins up at Hazel again, who does not respond, and stretches out in the sun. Her two little boys are knocking heads on the other side of the pool. The woman removes the straps of her suit from her shoulder, and Enoch whispers "King Jesus," as Hazel springs up and heads back to his **car**. Enoch follows him, shouting.

O'Connor's description of the woman is purposefully grotesque and animalistic. The woman is pleased to find Hazel and Enoch watching her, and the two of them seem frozen by her actions, until the moment of climax when she removes her straps. The whole event resembles a sort of failed mating ritual. Enoch's whispered curse keeps the shadow of religion present, as ever, while Hazel flees this woman, who seems to deeply unsettle him.

Hazel sits sourly in his **car**, tensed as if about to shout. Enoch asks him how he is, and Hazel responds that the guard told him he would find Enoch here, hiding in the bushes. Enoch blushes, but is flattered that Hazel came to see him. Hazel asks him where the blind man, Asa Hawks, lives. Enoch tells him he has something to show him, gripping him, but Hazel only repeats his question. Enoch promises to tell Hazel where they live, but only if he comes to see something, insisting on the trade. Enoch's **blood** pounds, anticipating the struggle of getting Hazel through the daily rituals ahead, but he is deadly determined.

Again, from Enoch's perspective, we can observe just how stiff and full of dark, nervous energy Hazel is. Enoch is happy that he has come, since he is lonely and wants a friend, but Hazel is only concerned with finding out Asa's address. Enoch, meanwhile, has his own agenda, having decided that Hazel is the one destined to see the mystery at the park's center. Enoch is totally devoted to the instinct of his blood, and to the ritual that he feels must be followed.

Enoch's brain is in two parts—the first part, in connection with his **blood**, does "the figuring" but never says anything, while the second part is full of words and phrases. This part engages Hazel in small talk about the **car**, or tries to. Hazel is totally unresponsive, as Enoch tells him about a yellow Ford his father once won. They stop at the Frosty Bottle, where a cow dressed as a housewife advertises ice cream.

This division is between the instinctual, animal part of Enoch, and the human façade that spouts small talk without ceasing. He tries to forge some connection with Hazel, who, in typical form, ignores him completely. The image of the housewife-as-cow continues O'Connor's work to establish the people of this town as animals.

Hazel is impatient as Enoch orders his milkshake from the muscled waitress. Enoch tells her that his friend "ain't hungry but for just to see you" as Hazel stands woodenly, and she glares at them both. Enoch tells Hazel that he has "changed some." He begins to suspect that the police are after Hazel, and that is why he is acting strangely—perhaps the car is stolen. He wonders if this is why he fled the pool. When the waitress delivers the milkshake and asks for payment, he jokes that she is worth more than fifteen cents, and then he blows bubbles into the shake.

The awkwardness of Hazel along for the ride with Enoch in his daily routine is darkly comic. O'Connor shows us Enoch's animal pleasures, the simple life he revels in, and his outsider status. He wants to connect, clearly, to the waitress, but goes about doing so in a hopelessly childish way. Enoch makes up his own story to explain Hazel's strange behavior, unable to wrap his head around Hazel's dark seriousness.

The waitress, Maude, walks over to Hazel and asks him why a nice quiet boy like him is spending time with a "son of a bitch" like Enoch. She goes on, telling Hazel that she always knows a clean boy when she sees one, facing Enoch and shouting so he can hear. Hazel tenses further, winding up. Enoch's **blood** tells him to hurry, and he slurps the milkshake. Maude continues to tell Hazel that a clean boy like him needs better company. Suddenly Hazel leans over the counter toward the woman and says "I AM clean." He then tells her blankly that if Jesus existed, he (Hazel) wouldn't be clean. She is startled, and yells at him, asking why she should give a goddamn what he is.

Maude seems to be talking to Hazel mostly as a means of communicating her disdain to Enoch, but she ends up angering Hazel when she repeats that he is a "clean boy." By this she seems to be implying that he is pure, good, and religious even, in the way he wants desperately to avoid. He interrupts to explain that he is clean, but not in the way she means – he is clean because everyone is, because the whole idea of being dirty is a lie of religion. Once again, Hazel's tirade against his religious destiny falls on deaf ears.

Enoch rushes Hazel out the door and into the car, desperate to get him to the dark secret. Hazel has snapped, and wants to leave, but Enoch insists, shuddering, that he had a sign this morning that he had to show Hazel this thing. Hazel is stubborn, but finally relents and follows Enoch's directions, still hoping to find out the Hawks' address. They go to the animals first, Enoch whining desperately as Hazel protests. Enoch shows Hazel the animals, and Enoch spits into the wolf cage, since he has no use for "hyenas." He forgets Hazel for a moment as he glares down at the wolf. Enoch is convinced the police are coming for Hazel. He hurries through his usual routine, stopping only at the cage of an ape to insult its shamelessly exposed ass.

Hazel bends his will to the force of Enoch's destiny, still hoping to find Asa's address. Enoch is almost herding him along at this point, nipping at his heels to keep him on the right path. He is showing Hazel a routine that is very important to Enoch, and which no one else knows about, but Hazel is impatient to get through it. Enoch's antagonistic relationship with the animals only serves to bring him closer to them in the reader's eyes – in a way similar to the manner in which Hazel's blasphemies against Jesus only reveal his attachment to religion.

Enoch hurries on, eager to get to their final destination, but Hazel has stopped by a cage. Enoch yells at him wildly that the cage is empty, but then sees an eye in the corner. It is a mop-like owl with one eye opened, staring at Hazel. Enoch tries to get him to follow, but Hazel addresses the eye, saying "I AM clean," as he did in the Frosty Bottle. As Enoch hustles him away, Hazel sees the distant figure of the woman with two little boys, and he stops protesting. Enoch is sweaty and tense, on the verge of something he doesn't understand. They start down a slippery hill, and Hazel shakes off Enoch's supportive arm. Enoch stops in front of the gray building and pronounces its name for the first time: "Muvseevum," or MVSEVM. He shivers, afraid to say it again.

Here is another moment where, from Enoch's perspective, Hazel must seem slightly unhinged. Hazel treats this owl the same way he treated the bird-like women on the train, or Maude in the Frosty Bottle – and in all three cases his self-defense is lost on the listener, since it says more about Hazel's own deep inner guilt and anger than anything that the people (or animals) watching him are doing. Enoch is still trying to connect with Hazel, in the throes of his semi-religious ritual, as evidenced by the comic seriousness of his mispronunciation of "Museum," which is like a holy mystery to him.

Hazel and Enoch go up the front stairs and sneak through the front door past the sleeping guard, who is old like a dried-up spider. The dark hall smells of linoleum, creosote, and an unnamable "undersmell." Enoch looks at Hazel to see if he too smells this third smell. His **blood** urges him forward, and he leads Hazel stealthily forward into a second hall, and then to a glass case like a **coffin**, where he stops with his neck thrust out and hands clasped together. Hazel looks and sees a shriveled corpse, three feet long, which Enoch explains was shrunk down by "some A-rabs." Enoch watches as Hazel stands frozen, staring at the corpse, his eyes empty. Enoch prays to Jesus that whatever is going to happen might happen now, as he hears someone coming.

The humans of Taulkinham continue to be compared to animals in O'Connor's descriptions. The "undersmell" is a part of the semi-religious mystery that Enoch believes is open only to the chosen few. Enoch takes Hazel to the dark secret, which is revealed to be a shrunken mummy in a coffin-like case – a symbol of mystery, death, and the past. It may remind Hazel of the small corpses of his younger brothers, whom he remembered being buried in the first chapter. This moment is climactic in Enoch's mind, and he is waiting for what he feels instinctively is fated to happen, praying intensely that nothing will interrupt it.

The woman with two little boys enters the room and comes to stand by the case, across from Hazel. She grins, and her reflection merges with Hazel's in the glass of the **coffin** case. When Hazel sees her he starts, and a noise escapes from his mouth. Enoch thinks it has come from the figure in the case. He dashes out after the fleeing Hazel, screaming for him to wait. Hazel shakes him, demanding the Hawks' address, but Enoch is not sure he knows it, and couldn't say it now at any rate. He falls over, slumped against a white tree, with an exalted look on his face, and watches hazily as Hazel throws a rock at his head, knocking him out. When Enoch comes to, he feels the **blood** on his forehead, and watches as it seems to widen into a little spring on the ground. He knows that his secret blood, here in the heart of the city, has only just begun its work.

This woman, too, is clearly lonely and seeking for some kind of connection, but it is one that deeply frightens Hazel, so that her reflection causes him to flee. Enoch, in his semi-religious furor, thinks he hears the corpse speak. Running after the fleeing Hazel, his experience is somehow complete, and he is "exalted" – another word with distinctly religious associations – to the point that he cannot help Hazel with the Hawks' address. Hazel's violence toward Enoch is then an expression of his frustration with the world, and recalls a man kicking a stray dog. The blood becomes part of this experience for Enoch, though, and is almost sacramental as it plants itself in the soil.

CHAPTER 6

That evening Haze drives around town until he finds Asa Hawks and the young girl. He follows them home, pressing his face against the **car** window to see their house number. Then Haze drives to the cinema, where a movie is just getting out. Haze climbs onto the nose of his car as the crowd drains out of the theater. A thin man with three "portly" women is buying tickets and refreshments, as the women laugh loudly.

Here the car continues to be a vehicle of Hazel's free will, allowing him to accomplish on his own what he had wanted to do with Enoch's help. As a home, though, it is somewhat isolating and lonely. Soon it will also be another echo of the influence of Hazel's country preacher grandfather, as Hazel prepares to address the people of Taulkinham from the car's roof.

As three men in red satin lumberjackets exit, Hazel begins to preach, asking them to show him where Jesus' redeeming **blood** touched them. The group of women turns to look at him, and the thin man calls him a "wise guy." Hazel repeats his question, and asks the men in satin what church they go to. One giggles, and the other answers in falsetto ("to hide the truth"), "Church of Church." Haze tells them he preaches the Church Without Christ, "where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way." They start to leave, and Haze continues, telling them that he will take the truth with him wherever he goes—that there was no fall and no redemption, and that Jesus is a liar.

The comic, grotesque listeners are unmoved by Hazel's interrogation, which promotes the idea of empirical truth – only believing in the things that can be seen and touched. The giggling men in satin don't take Hazel seriously, but Hazel, as ever, remains grave and intense. He continues to preach the truth of atheism, mostly as a rejection of the truth of Christ, as he rails against his destiny—even while reenacting his grandfather's role as a man preaching from the hood of a car.

The crowd disperses, and Hazel begins his speech again with the next group to emerge, and then again with the next. The woman in the ticket booth glares at him. She has white hair "stacked in sausages around her head," and yells at him to go and do his preaching in a church. Hazel says that without Christ, there is no reason to have a set place to preach. She threatens to call the police, so he drives away, and preaches at three other cinemas before going back to Mrs. Watts.

The ticket booth lady's hair is reminiscent of Mrs. Hitchcock in the train. Like Mrs. Hitchcock, and many since, she labels Hazel as a preacher, somehow recognizing his spiritual destiny immediately. Hazel, though, now thinks he has found a way to be a preacher of his own free will, and to fight against Christianity's pull on him – even if his blasphemies only seem to reaffirm his attachment to religion.

The next morning Hazel goes to the house where Asa Hawks lives, and asks the suspicious landlady if he can rent a room. He tells her he is a preacher in the Church Without Christ, and when she asks if it is Protestant or "something foreign," he tells her Protestant. She shows him a tiny room, with a door that opens onto a thirty-foot drop into the backyard. Hazel only asks if Hawks lives there, and pays for the room when she says yes. Then he goes downstairs and knocks on Hawks' door.

The landlady's comic misunderstanding of Hazel's mission with the Church Without Christ – that such a thing could possibly be Protestant – shows the shallow understanding that the inhabitants of this town have of spiritual things. They want what is familiar (not "foreign"), but are not very concerned with probing the truth of what that means. Hazel is still single-mindedly focused on Hawks.

The young girl opens the door, and tells her father that it is the boy who keeps following her. Asa comes to the door, looking sour and unfriendly. Hazel tells him that he has moved in to the house, and says that if his daughter means to give him so much eye, he should return some. She protests, insisting that it was Hazel who looked her up and down when they met. Haze stares at the scars on Asa's face. He is confused when the preacher shuts the door—he had expected a secret welcome.

Hazel decides to use the young girl's claim—that he is romantically interested in her—as a cover for his true interest in moving into the house: to probe Asa Hawks' mystery and impose the challenge of his own Church Without Christ. Asa's grumpy greeting confuses him, since the preacher makes no attempt to save his soul, as he should. Hawks clearly has a secret.

Removing his dark glasses, Asa peers out the window at Hazel as he gets in his car and drives away—it's clear that Asa is not blind at all. He mutters that Hazel is a "Jesus-hog," but the young girl defends Hazel, saying that Asa himself used to be that way, and he got over it. She tries to convince Asa that if she can seduce Hazel, then Asa can go away like he wants to. Asa considers this evilly, smoking a cigarette. Then he laughs, and agrees to show Hazel a "clipping".

O'Connor quickly reveals this secret: Asa is a fraud, and not blind at all. He accuses Hazel, whose resolute atheism only serves to convince those around him that he is deeply, inescapably religious, of being a "Jesus-hog," and Sabbath hints at further secrets from Asa's past in response. They hatch a plan to seduce the unsuspecting Hazel.

Meanwhile Hazel is sitting in his **car** to think, and he decides to seduce the young girl. If he sees his daughter ruined, Hazel thinks, then Asa will understand that Hazel is serious about the Church Without Christ. Hazel is also tired of Mrs. Watts, who cut an obscene shape out of his **hat** the night before. He doesn't want a woman for pleasure—he wants one to prove that he doesn't believe in sin. Before going back to his room, Hazel goes to buy a new hat, choosing one that is the exact opposite from his old one: a glaring white.

Having just revealed that the young girl is not so pure as Hazel thinks, O'Connor now sets Hazel on a comic mission to seduce her as a way of proving his seriousness about atheism. His break with Mrs. Watts proves that pleasure, the animal urge, is not what motivates him – he wants a woman as a way of asserting his free will and rejecting his past and religious destiny. His new hat is just as odd and isolating as his old one, and so as a symbol it remains practically the same.

Hazel returns to the Hawks' room that afternoon, when they are eating supper. He doesn't look at the young girl, but stays focused on Asa, who barely managed to get his dark glasses on before Hazel entered. Hazel asks why Jesus doesn't cure Asa's blindness. Asa responds that St. Paul was blinded. Hazel asks about the scars on Asa's face, and Hawks shows him a yellowed newspaper clipping. The clipping explains that Hawks promised to blind himself at a revival to justify his belief that Christ had redeemed him. Hazel is struck by the clipping, and reads it three times. The young girl pipes up, explaining that Asa blinded himself with lime, and says that hundreds were converted.

Now that we know the Hawks are not what Hazel thinks they are, we have a new perspective on the lies he is being taken in by. The story of Asa's supposed blinding strikes Hazel to the core, since it demonstrates a commitment to the truth of Christ that he once felt, and is now trying desperately to escape. This is the kind of conviction that Hazel seems born into – the conviction of a martyr, one set apart from the world. The irony is that this conviction is just an act for Asa, so Hazel is even more alone than he thinks.

Hazel murmurs that "nobody with a good **car** needs to be justified," and hurries out of the room. He then reopens the door to give the young girl a note he had written, telling her that he came because he "never saw anybody looked as good" as her. Asa is annoyed that Haze left with his clipping, but the girl mockingly reminds him that there is another one. The other clipping reads "Evangelist's Nerve Fails." Ten years before, Asa had preached for an hour at a revival, working himself into a fury, and then plunged his hands into the lime and streaked his face, but he had been unable to put the lime into his eyes.

Hazel leans on the idea of free will and self-reliance that his car represents. The awkwardness of his "seductive" note delivery is comic in this context. Once Hazel is gone, O'Connor reveals the second clipping, which completes the story that Hazel read, explaining how Asa lost his nerve on the edge of his big moment and never blinded himself at all. This begins to explain Hawks' current lonely, bitter state.

Hazel takes his **car** to a garage and asks the mechanic to fix the horn and take out the leaks in the gas tank. After a silent inspection of the car, the mechanic tells him that it can't be done. Hazel insists that it is a good car, and that it gives him a place he can always get away in. He leaves the garage and goes to another, where the mechanic tells him he can have the car in the best shape overnight, since it is already such a good car. Hazel leaves it with him, "certain that it is in honest hands."

The first mechanic tells Hazel the truth the reader knows, but which Hazel is unable to hear: it is a terrible car. Continuing the recent string of lies, however, the second mechanic tells Hazel exactly what he wants to hear – that his car, emblem of his free will, is an excellent one. Hazel is completely taken in, deceived and deceiving himself.

CHAPTER 7

The next day Hazel takes the **car** out to drive in the country. The sky is blue, with only one cloud, a large one with "curls and a beard." A mile from town, he discovers the young girl proudly hidden in the backseat of his car. He is angry at first, but then he remembers his plan to seduce her, and changes his tone stiffly. She slides into the front seat and introduces herself as Sabbath Lily Hawks, telling Hazel that her mother named her that and then died. Hazel tightens his jaw, his pleasure in the car gone. Sabbath reveals that she is a bastard, as her parents were unmarried. Hazel is so surprised that Asa could have a bastard that he nearly drives into the ditch.

The bearded cloud is a reminder of one "family-friendly" vision of God. Sabbath has invaded the car, a space that Hazel cherishes as his own, but his anger at this invasion is comically cut short by the memory of his plan to seduce her. Sabbath's mother is dead too, so they have that loneliness in common. The revelation that Sabbath is a bastard confuses Hazel, who is still convinced that Asa is a true believer, and is perhaps also still more concerned with sin and guilt than most people.

Sabbath tells Hazel about a letter that she wrote to Mary Brittle, the advice columnist. She asked whether, since she was a bastard and so could not enter the kingdom of heaven anyway, she ought to "neck" with the boys who tended to follow her. The columnist wrote back that light necking should be fine, and that maybe she should consider adjusting her religious outlook to the modern world. Hazel is still stuck on the idea of her being a bastard. Sabbath tells him about a second letter she wrote, asking if she should "go the whole hog," but this letter never received a response.

Here, Sabbath begins to reveal that she is not so pure as Hazel thinks, and that she has at least thought seriously about not just "necking," but sex, and with multiple suitors – but Hazel remains oblivious. The light sarcasm of Mary Brittle again points out that the seriousness with which Hazel takes religion is out of place in the modern world – he is an outsider. Still puzzling over the idea that Asa could have a bastard, Hazel misses all of this.

Hazel continues to interrogate Sabbath about Asa's past, asking what it was that caused him to believe in Jesus. Sabbath slides her foot next to Hazel, but he kicks it away. Sabbath warns him to stop feeling her leg, and she suggests that they turn down a dirt road, where the view is consumed on one side by the city and the white cloud. Sabbath says they should get out to sit under a tree and "get better acquainted." They go past a barbed wire fence, Hazel still asking Sabbath about Asa. Sabbath removes her shoes and stockings. Hazel protests, but follows her, still asking questions, which she ignores.

It seems clear that Hazel is not interested in Sabbath, but in Asa, as he tries comically to put off her open and forward advances. Just as she ignores Hazel's questions about Asa, so he ignores the obvious intention of her suggestion that they walk across the field and get "better acquainted" under the tree. The mismatch between the two is comical, as Sabbath boldly removes her shoes and stockings.

Sabbath sits on the ground and motions for Hazel to join her. He sits on a rock five feet away, aware that he should be seducing her, but not eager to begin, given her apparent innocence. Sabbath asks him if his Church Without Christ can save a bastard, and Hazel says that in his church, there is no such thing as a bastard. Something inside him immediately contradicts this, though, telling him that the only truth is that Jesus is a liar, and that a bastard can't be saved because *no* one can. He keeps this to himself, however.

Their figurative dance of misunderstandings continues, as Hazel is still convinced that Sabbath is innocent, another example of his own inability to see the "empirical" truth that is right in front of him. He is tied up in the theological and spiritual implications of a bastard in the Church Without Christ, unaware of the physical, animal event that Sabbath seems to be expecting. The bastard question troubles his rejection of sin.

Sabbath tells another story, about an unwanted child whose family sent it around until it wound up with its evil grandmother, who swelled up immediately, since she had violent allergies to anything good. The child, virtuous and kind, had a vision of its grandmother in hellfire, and it told her what it saw, but her swelling – a reaction to the good in the child - only got worse, until she went mad and hung herself with the rope in the well. "Would you guess me to be fifteen years old?" Sabbath asks Hazel, and suggests that he lie down and rest. He moves a few feet away and does so, putting his **hat** over his face. Sabbath crawls over to him and removes it like a lid, staring into his eyes. She lowers her head until their noses are almost touching and says, "I see you."

Here is another child-centered story from Sabbath, a dark parable ending in death that seems to come out of nowhere. Clearly the frightening vision of religion that Hazel was brought up with lives in her too. She is quite young, but also bolder and more experienced than the awkward Hazel, who still doesn't pick up on the true intention behind her suggestion that he lie down. When Sabbath removes his guard, though—the hat, a symbol of his spiritual nature—and really looks at him, Hazel is shaken in the same way he was by the owl's gaze. It ignites something in him that feels guilty, and does not want to be watched.

Hazel jumps away violently, and Sabbath runs behind the tree and says "I see you" again. Hazel heads back up the road to the unlocked **car**, but begins to panic when it won't start. Sabbath comes to the window, and he asks her what she did to his car. Then he gets out and walks down the road to a gas station. When Sabbath arrives after him, she goes to a cage containing "two deadly enemies," a wounded bear dusted with bird lime and a chicken hawk, glaring at one another. A man at the station drives Hazel and Sabbath back to the car, ignoring Hazel's account of the Church Without Christ and its stance on bastards.

Sabbath repeats herself, reinforcing Hazel's panic, which is only made worse by his faulty car. The vehicle of his free will, which would allow him to escape Sabbath's gaze, won't start. This is also a sign that what Hazel stubbornly insisted was true (that this is a good car) might not be. The animals cruelly bound together in the cage are a bleak image of the world, and the hawk is a reminder of Asa Hawks.

The man puts a gallon of gas in the **car**, but it still doesn't start. He silently examines the engine, not answering when Hazel asks him what's wrong. The man has one arm and slate blue eyes. He slides under the car, and lies there contemplating its underbelly. Hazel continues to insist that it's a good car, but the man doesn't respond. He pushes their car with his truck, and it finally starts. Hazel asks him, triumphantly, what he owes him, but the man says that he wants nothing at all.

There is some masculine wisdom in this solitary, silent man, who can clearly see that the car is a terrible one. He helps them, but won't lie to Hazel, won't respond to his chatter, and won't take his money. In contrast to the majority of O'Connor's characters, who are greedy, shallow, grotesque, and animal-like, this man seemingly wants nothing and, despite his bad arm, is strong and self-reliant.

Hazel drives on, telling Sabbath he doesn't need any favors. She says that the car is grand and drives smooth as honey. Hazel says that this is because it wasn't built by foreigners or one-armed men, but by people with their eyes open. The truck pulls up alongside them, and Hazel brags about his car, saying that it can take him anywhere. "Some things," says the man, will "get some folks somewheres." The "bearded" cloud has turned into a bird with long thin wings.

Hazel and Sabbath lie to one another and themselves about the state of the car, once again ignoring the empirical truth. The silent man responds to Hazel's bragging with a vague but evocative proverb. The god-like cloud that followed the pair on this country adventure has left, replaced by a bird – possibly a reference to Asa and the chicken hawk, or another reminder of the animal nature of humanity.

CHAPTER 8

Enoch feels deeply that something monumental is beginning, and his wise **blood** is stirring. He does not plan, but finds himself proceeding according to instinct, like a bird builds a nest without thinking. This started when Hazel saw the dark secret at the museum. Enoch's sensitive blood knows that what he will do will be awful, but he is ignorant of what it could be.

O'Connor switches back to Enoch's perspective here, as his instincts begin to stir again. She explicitly compares his way of acting to that of an animal – his instinct and belief circumvents or precedes thought. There is a sense of something dark and dangerous to come, but Enoch knows he cannot avoid it – his fate is outside of his control.

First, Enoch begins to save his pay, which is unusual. He also regularly steals from supermarkets, where he customarily spends an hour each day after the park, but he thinks the extra money exceeds what he is saving by stealing. He also finds himself cleaning his room, which is part of a mummified old house. He hangs a rug out for air and it disintegrates. When he washes the bed and chair he uncovers a layer of gold paint, but this also disappears. The chair collapses, and he has an urge to kick it, but he leaves it, unsure if it is a "sign." There is also a clawed washstand with a "tabernacle-like" cabinet that Enoch keeps empty, since he doesn't have a slop-jar and has a "certain reverence for the purpose of things."

Enoch's instincts are not just of the "run, jump, hide" variety – he follows the voice of his wise blood almost religiously, like a prophet, wherever it leads him. In this case he is driven to save and to clean. He has a reverence for the mysterious actions and their consequences, as evidenced by the chair incident – a reverence that helps check his animal impulse to attack the chair. Enoch's belief in things, like the tabernacle, is child-like, investing awe in what he doesn't understand.

The washstand is what Enoch feels is most important in the room, most linked to mysterious rites he does not understand. Because he always proceeds from least to most important, though, he first turns his attention to the paintings on his wall. One, belonging to the near-blind landlady, is of a moose. Enoch finds it insufferable, thinking of the moose as a terrible roommate. He insults the moose continually in his mind, although he is more careful when speaking aloud. Enoch realizes that removing the painting's ornate frame will leave the moose naked and shameful, and he snickers as he does so. Enoch's favorite painting is from a calendar, and shows a small boy kneeling at his bed, saying "and bless daddy." The final painting, also from a calendar, shows a woman wearing a tire.

Ever a creature of ritual and habit, Enoch goes about his task with purpose. The way that Enoch thinks of the moose, as with the antagonism that he feels toward the animals in the zoo, betrays that he thinks of himself as being on a similar, animal level to it – as if the two are roommates. The fact that it is a painted moose, and that he speaks to it continuously, also leads us to question his mental balance, and to see just how lonely he is for companionship. His solution to the moose's snobbery—to remove the frame as if it were the moose's clothing—is juvenile and comic. The final two paintings reinforce this sense that Enoch is young and alone, lacking his father, love, and connection.

On the orders of his wise **blood**, Enoch buys some curtains, gilt paint, and a brush. He is disappointed because he had hoped the saved money would be for new clothes. It isn't until he gets home that he realizes the gilt is for painting the inside of the cabinet, preparing it for something yet unknown. Enoch doesn't rush his wise blood to reveal its secret, but waits for the certainty he knows will come.

There is a dark comedy in the disconnect between what Enoch wants or hopes for (new clothes) and what his instinct selects for him. He resigns himself more or less completely to the fate decided by his wise blood, and uses the paint to prepare the tabernacle for some mystery yet to be revealed.

The next, Monday, Enoch wakes up knowing that whatever important event is to come will happen that day. His **blood** rushes around, but he tries rebelliously to stay in bed and avoid what's coming, surly at this insistent force. Naturally, Enoch gives in, and is at the zoo only a half hour later than he should have been. All through his shift he fights his blood's wild feeling, and when he finishes, he heads toward town. This is the last place he wants to be, because anything might happen there, but his actions seem to be outside of his control. Exhausted from the struggle, Enoch leans against the Walgreen's window and begins to scratch himself against the glass, with its colorful displays.

The resignation to his fate is less evident here, as Enoch tries in vain to assert his free will by staying in bed. He is unable to do so for very long, though, with a wild sense of what must be done, again resembling a reluctant prophet figure from the Old Testament. Ultimately he cannot resist, and heads into town. Enoch moves like an animal, scratching himself against the glass, but with the awareness of a higher purpose chasing him at every step.

Enoch is drawn toward a popcorn machine, and fishes two nickels out of the money pouch his father had given him. The boy serving the popcorn compliments the purse, but Enoch is too preoccupied to try and make a friend, and he heads back to the drug store. Inside, he goes to the counter, and the waitress offers him a Lime-Cherry Surprise from beneath the counter. As she insists that it is fresh, Enoch tells her that "something is going to happen today." Finally she says "God" and jerks away the drink, making him a new one. Enoch leaves it there and exits the store.

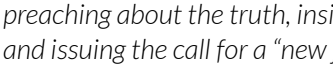
Normally, the lonely Enoch would have been thrilled to discuss his father's pouch with this potential friend, but today his attention is on his fated mission. He has another in the series of comical, misunderstanding-laden interactions with waitresses throughout the novel, further revealing his inability to relate to people – especially women. He is too preoccupied to understand what it is that she wants from him.

Enoch is hurrying home now, eager to escape whatever thing his **blood** has in store for him. He is mad that his money was wasted on drapes instead of a new, shiny tie, and is sure that whatever is about to happen will be against the law, and against his will. He passes a poster for a horror movie and tells himself there is no way he will go in to see a movie like that—but then he finds himself buying a ticket and feeling around in the dark of the theater, like the Biblical Jonah inside the whale. Enoch tells himself that he won't watch the movie, but he peers out from behind his knees and sits through three movies. The last one, about a baboon who saves children from a burning building and is given a medal, finally pushes him over the edge, and he rushes out of the theater.

Rebelling further against his instincts, against fate, and against this force that seems to be calling him to dangerous action, Enoch tries to escape, but he is inexorably drawn along against his will into the theater. O'Connor compares Enoch directly to Jonah, the reluctant prophet who tried to escape his duty, and was punished by being swallowed by a whale. Enoch cuts a comic, lonely figure, with his knees up, sequestered in the dark theater until he can't stand it any longer – a hated baboon is earning good favor, and he is envious.

Enoch recovers against the wall outside, and feels that his fate is almost upon him. At this point his resignation is perfect. He begins to walk as if led by "one of those whistles that only dogs hear," and comes upon the figure of Hazel Motes preaching on top of his **car**. Enoch has not seen Hazel since the day in the park, and now he listens as Hazel preaches about the peace to be found in the Church Without Christ. A few people start to walk away, and Hazel shouts after them that the truth doesn't matter to them, since Jesus existing or not doesn't change their lives in any way. What they and the Church Without Christ need, he says, is a new jesus, one who is all man, without **blood** to waste on redemption, one who looks like no one else. Hazel calls for someone to show him this Jesus.

Beaten down by his experience in the figurative belly of the whale, Enoch is now prepared for what is to come. The metaphor of the dog whistle that O'Connor uses to describe Enoch's movement is a perfect way of understanding his character – animal, and driven by something invisible (and, perhaps, painful) that the rest of us cannot understand. Again his fate intersects with Hazel's. Hazel is preaching about the truth, insisting that Jesus does not affect them, and issuing the call for a "new jesus" with no blood to waste. In this moment Enoch understands that his mission is to find the "new jesus"—the shriveled man in the museum.



Enoch begins to shout in response, but without making a sound. Hazel continues preaching, telling people to take counsel from their **blood** and enter into the Church Without Christ. Enoch tries to bellow that he has the new jesus, but his blood stops him from speaking, reminding him that the last time he saw Hazel, Hazel had hit him over the head with a rock. But Enoch knows his purpose now, and he realizes that the cabinet in his room has been prepared to hold the mummified corpse, which he must steal from the museum. He hurries away, almost running into a taxi. Not reacting in anger to the driver's insults as he normally would, Enoch heads home.

Hazel's sermon happens, whether by coincidence or fate, to overlap with Enoch's thought processes, as he advises people to follow their blood. Enoch finds himself unable to speak, despite his excitement at the revelation of his mission, because his blood fears what Hazel's reaction might be. Enoch is portrayed as a kind of John the Baptist in the wilderness, a prophet preparing the way for the "new jesus," with his carefully painted tabernacle waiting to receive him. Now it is Enoch's turn to be so consumed by purpose that he is nearly run over by a car.

CHAPTER 9

Since Hazel moved in, Asa Hawks has been hiding from him behind the bolted door of his room. Hawks is often drunk, and doesn't want to face Hazel's curious gaze. Hazel doesn't understand why a preacher wouldn't want to save his lost soul. Instead of seeing Hawks, Hazel is stuck with Sabbath, who now follows him around. He has abandoned seducing her, and now tries to protect himself from her persistent attempts to sneak into his bed, sometimes late at night. On one occasion she comes with a candle, wearing a nightgown, and he threatens her with a chair. Hawks presses his daughter to continue, however, as he plans to leave soon.

In the same way that Hazel is frightened of eyes watching him, Hawks shies away from the curious gaze of Hazel – both have a history with guilt and sin. But Hazel has not yet seen through Hawks' ruse, even if he has finally realized that Sabbath is not as innocent as he thought. Her attempts to seduce him have become more and more brazen, and there is no longer any pretense at all, as he has to threaten her with violence to keep her away from his bed, in an almost comic confrontation.

Hazel's plans have failed—he still has no followers in the Church Without Christ, except for one sixteen-year-old who asked to go with him to a whorehouse. After they had gone, the boy said that they were both guilty of a mortal sin, and he could not join Hazel's church because he was a Lapsed Catholic. Hazel, who enjoyed the whorehouse much less than the boy, shouts that there is no such thing as sin or redemption, but the boy just shrugs and asks Hazel if he wants to return the next night.

The story of Hazel's single follower is a comic jab from the Catholic O'Connor at those who pay lip service to the religion while continuing to live in sin. This is a central paradox in the story – Hazel, who claims to be a committed atheist, takes religion much more seriously than all of the townspeople that he is trying convert away from their shallow "faith."

Two nights later, another disciple appears, following Hazel to all four picture shows while he preaches. He is dressed "like an ex-preacher turned cowboy," with an "honest look that fitted into his face like false teeth." He keeps winking at Hazel. As the last few people disperse at the end of the night, with Hazel telling them that blasphemy is the only way to the truth, the man steps up and calls them back. He begins a charming, and down-to-earth address. He asks the crowd if they know what it's like to not have a friend in the world, and one man responds that it "ain't no worsen havinum that would put a knife your back when you wasn't looking."

There is something off about this "disciple" as well, as signaled by O'Connor's cutting description of his insincere honesty and persistent winks. Hazel, meanwhile, is preaching about the way to the truth – but as soon as he finishes, the mysterious new disciple begins his well-oiled con act. This speech begins with an appeal to the basic loneliness of existence, and a life without friends – the kind of life that Enoch and Hazel live. He works the initially uncooperative crowd smoothly.

The man starts to draw a larger crowd, promising to recount what Hazel's ideas have done for him. Meanwhile Hazel stands motionless and confused. The man introduces himself as Onnie Jay Holy. He continues to work the crowd, telling them that two months ago he was another man, lonesome and lost. He tells them that everyone is born sweet, but then something happens that drives that love inside, and we all become lonely and sick. He was this way, he says, and just needed someone to help him bring out the sweetness—he needed Hazel, the Prophet. Two months ago, he says, he met Hazel, and it changed his life.

Onnie's tale continues to draw on the idea that people are prone to loneliness. He offers up Hazel as a means of recovering the "sweetness" natural in us all—a line of argument that stands in stark contrast to the dark, abrasive, and confrontational preaching that Hazel normally engages in from the top of his car. "Onnie" proposes religion as a source of comfort and happiness, which doesn't exactly match with the language used by Hazel.

At this point Hazel interrupts to say that Onnie Jay Holy is "not true," telling everyone that he had never seen the man before that night. No one listens to him, though—they are all taken by Onnie's humble manner. Onnie tells them they can trust the church because there's nothing foreign in it, and you don't have to believe anything you don't understand—it's up-to-date, a church based on their personal interpretations of the Bible. Hazel interjects, calling him a liar, but Onnie talks over him, pointing out a baby in the crowd and appealing to them on behalf of its inner sweetness to join the "Holy Church of Christ Without Christ," which will cost them only a dollar.

Hazel is dumbfounded at Onnie's brazen dishonesty, but it seems to be working the crowd over much more effectively than Hazel's "truth" had. Onnie describes a new church that O'Connor clearly finds contemptible—a watered-down, shallow, modern version of Christianity that appeals to sweetness and sentimentality while ignoring duty or sin. Hazel too finds this revolting, because it is so clearly, he thinks, a lie. It also turns out that Onnie's motivation is entirely financial, as he asks for donations.

Hazel tries to shout that you can't know the truth for money, but Onnie Jay Holy immediately twists this into an endorsement of how cheap their church is—barely costing anything. He begins to write down names of the gathered listeners, but Hazel jumps into the **car**, attempting to start it. Onnie tells him to wait, but he begins to slowly drive away. The car stalls repeatedly, though, so Onnie can easily catch up and get in with Hazel. He's clearly angry at having lost the money of the assembled group. Onnie then turns on the charm again, telling Hazel that he reminds him of Jesus Christ and Abraham Lincoln. Hazel is outraged, repeating that Onnie "ain't true." Onnie replies that he is a real radio preacher, and Hazel stops the car, telling him to get out.

The comic inability of Hazel to defend his own church against the silver-tongued Onnie Jay Holy demonstrates how little he understands human connection – he is a born outsider. He rushes to his car to escape this dishonest attack, but of course that ever-untrustworthy vehicle of his free will fails yet again. At the core of Onnie's practiced lies is a true observation—that Hazel is different from the other people of this town, and somehow more serious or spiritual. Eventually Hazel can no longer endure Onnie's lying manner.

Onnie persists as Hazel tries to start the malfunctioning **car**, telling him that he needs an "artist-type" to help him run the Church. He tries to get Hazel to reveal the location of the new jesus, asking repeatedly as Hazel begins to push the car forward. Onnie helps him get it to a parking space. Hazel decides to spend the night in the car, and gets in the back, closing the fringed shades and ignoring Onnie's questions. Finally when Onnie offers to pay him, Hazel tells him that there is no "new jesus," that it was only a "way to say a thing." This causes the smile to "more or less slither" off Onnie's face.

Onnie's misunderstanding of the "new jesus" – his belief that it was not just a figure of speech – is similar to Enoch's, although the two have very different responses to their belief that Hazel is speaking about a real figure. The whole exchange between the slimy con-man and the devotedly honest and awkward Hazel is painful and comic, undercut as it is by Hazel's rage and his persistent car trouble.

Hazel repeats himself to the transformed Onnie (who now reveals his real name, Hoover Shoats), and tries to close the **car** door around his head. Frustrated, Hazel slams the door, catching Shoats' thumb. Shoats howls in pain, and then returns to threaten Hazel, declaring that he will find his own new jesus, that he can buy "Prophets for peanuts," and that he will out-preach Hazel. From the behind the curtain Hazel hits the car's broken horn, which releases a strangled sound.

Hazel makes a definite enemy of this skilled con-man – who has lied about everything, even his name – by comically slamming his thumb in the door. Given just how much more successful the false preacher was in his attempt to engage the crowd, it seems that Hazel is in for some serious competition. Hazel has shut himself off in his car, however, which is still malfunctioning.

Shoats leaves after a final threat, and then Hazel falls asleep and has a nightmare in the **car**'s backseat. He dreams that he has been buried alive and is waiting on nothing, that various people are eyeing him through the window—he recognizes Enoch, and then the woman with two little boys, who tries to climb into the car with him. He expects to see Asa Hawks come, but he never does. Waking up, Hazel tries the starter, and the car runs as if nothing were wrong.

This episode mirrors the nightmare in the coffin-like bunk of the train, and is similarly a reflection of how alone Hazel is, and how afraid of death. The people who attempt to reach him through the window also function as unwelcome "watchers" in the same sense as the owl in the zoo – figures of conscience. Hazel is still preoccupied with Asa, but seems to sense something is off with him.

Hazel drives home, and then decides to pick the lock on Asa Hawks' door. He does so, and then he crosses the dark room to Hawks' bed, his heart pounding. Hazel squats down and strikes a match close to his face, causing Hawks to open his eyes. The two make eye contact while the light of the match lasts, with Hazel's eyes opening "onto a deeper blankness." Hawks then jabs at him, saying that now Hazel can leave him alone. Hazel's expressionless face moves back under his white **hat**.

Hazel goes at last to investigate his suspicion about Asa, to find the truth, and he is confronted with what the reader knows already: Asa is a fraud. Some part of Hazel seems deeply hurt and disappointed by this—perhaps he had hoped that someone else could be as honestly serious about religion as he is. As this illusion falls he seems to retreat further into himself, away from the world.

CHAPTER 10

The next night, Haze parks his **car** outside the Odeon theater and begins to preach, striking a strange pose atop his car. He tells the listeners that each of them has their own truth, but there is only one truth behind them all, and that is that there is no truth. He explains that there is no place for them—where they come from is gone, and where they were going was never there. There is no place for them outside themselves, and it does no good to look for one. Hazel continues: if there were a Fall, or a Redemption, or a Judgment, it would need to be in their bodies and their time, but there is none to be seen. The conscience is a trick, it doesn't exist, and if it does it should be hunted down and killed.

This is Hazel's lengthiest sermon on the nature of truth and human existence. There is no singular truth like the one claimed by Christianity, he says, no such thing as "truth" at all. There is a certain humor in the fact that this claim comes right on the heels of Onnie Jay Holy, the novel's most brazen liar. Hazel preaches that the only truth is empirical—that is, what can be seen. There is no comfort available in religion, and no cure to the loneliness of life – but also, there is no need to feel guilt or be redeemed, and no such thing as sin. Conscience should be killed like an animal.

Hazel is preaching with such concentration that he doesn't notice a rat-colored car pulling up across the street. He doesn't see Hoover Shoats and a man dressed exactly like Hazel emerge and climb up on the nose of their car. When he sees them, he is struck by how thin and odd his imposter is, never having thought of himself that way. Hazel approaches their car, his gaze fixed on the bleak man impersonating him. Shoats gathers a crowd, and a fat woman near Hazel asks if he and the imposter are twins. Hazel replies that "if you don't hunt it down and kill it, it'll hunt you down and kill you." She misinterprets his words, still thinking they are twins.

The revenge of Hoover Shoats is swift in coming, and darkly comic in its exacting reproduction of Hazel's image. Having just discussed the conscience – a tool for looking at oneself, in a way – Hazel is presented with a unique chance to examine himself through this impostor who exactly resembles him, and he does not like what he sees. He is deeply disturbed by this view of himself, a complete outsider, by the dishonesty of the whole operation, and by the way the impostor's appearance coincided with his sermon on conscience – as if by fate.

Hazel drives away in his **car** and returns to his room, where Sabbath Hawks is waiting in the bed. She stubbornly refuses to leave, but Hazel ignores her. She tells him that Asa has left, and says that she saw Hazel come in and uncover Asa's secret. She's amazed that anyone could have been fooled by such a little crook as Asa. Hazel unties his boots, which are painted black to obscure their army origins. Sabbath continues to talk, telling him that she has no place to go, and that from the minute she saw him, she knew that Hazel was the man for her, that he was filthy right down to the guts, like her. She offers to teach Hazel how to like being that way, and asks if he wants that.

Sabbath is not aware of just how deep a crisis Hazel is experiencing in this moment, but the reader knows that he is particularly vulnerable and alone. Sabbath, too, is in crisis – her father has left her here alone – and she is desperate to win Hazel over. Hazel's boots are another reminder that the past is never far away, no matter how hard he tries to run. Sabbath can't understand how anyone could have been so blind as to miss the truth that was right in front of them, but Hazel has been doing this all along. Sabbath, like Mrs. Watts, offers Hazel access to the animalistic side of life, to a world of sin and connection that is guilt-free.

Speaking for the first time, Hazel says "Yeah," with no change in his expression. He takes off his coat and trousers, then his drawers, and puts them on the chair. Then he removes his socks and stares at his feet. Sabbath tells him to "make haste," and Hazel unbuttons his shirt and drops it to the floor. He slides under the covers with her. Breathing quickly, Sabbath says, "Take off your **hat**, king of the beasts," and snatches off the hat, throwing it across the room.

Moving almost automatically, in deliberate steps, Hazel asks to be shown this animal world free from guilt. He removes all of his clothes in a slow ritual that is not romantic so much as it is a stripping away of barriers, of inhibitions, of everything – most importantly his hat – that represents his humanity and spiritual destiny, until he is hailed by Sabbath as "king of the beasts." He is once again trying to escape his spirituality by becoming beastlike.

CHAPTER 11

At noon the next day a figure in a long black raincoat with a lightish **hat** pulled down over his face is moving rapidly through the streets, a bundle about the size of a baby in his arms. The figure wears dark glasses and has a black beard pinned on with safety pins. He runs as it starts to rain heavily, ducking into a drugstore and lowering his glasses—it is Enoch, on his way to Hazel Motes' house with the mummy, which he has stolen from the museum.

The initial description of this figure recalls Hazel's normal attire, or even Asa Hawks', and his identity is deliberately hidden. O'Connor soon reveals that the comic figure is a poorly disguised Enoch, running alone through the rainy streets with the mummy – stolen from the museum to become Hazel's "new jesus." She doesn't give us an account of the act of stealing, but skips the practical details to instead deliver this scene of grotesque religious iconography.

Enoch stole the shriveled mummy the day before, smearing his face with brown shoe polish so that if he were seen people would "take him for a colored person." At home he had taken the "new jesus" out of its sack and put it into the gilded cabinet. He waited for something supreme and unknown to happen, but then decided he needed to get things started. He inserted his own head into the cabinet, and after a few moments of silence, a violent sneeze caused Enoch to smash his head against the top of the cabinet. He then realized resentfully that he had to deliver the little man to Hazel. Enoch ate a candy bar rapidly, "as if he had something against it."

O'Connor continues to remind her reader of the persistent racism in this community, although this is not a focus of the novel. Enoch treats the mummy with a religious reverence, making use of the pseudo-tabernacle that instinct and fate provided for this moment. He has a primitive, child-like appreciation for the power of the unknown, one that is undercut by the slapstick humor of hitting his head on the top of the cabinet. The adversarial way that Enoch approaches parts of the world – like this candy bar – feels distinctly animal.

Now Enoch is on his way to Hazel's house, although he has never been there before. He is sullen at having to spend his day off performing this task, which he never wanted to do in the first place. He opens his landlady's ancient umbrella, but it comes stabbing down at him as soon as the rain touches it. He is forced to hold it open with one hand, so that the dog's head carved into its base digs into his stomach. Despite all this he is still soaked, and ducks under the marquee of a movie house for shelter.

O'Connor offers up more slapstick comedy here with the malfunctioning umbrella. It seems as though the whole world is set against the lonely Enoch, who is driven by instinct and a semi-religious sense of destiny out into the rain, where another animal figure – the dog head on the umbrella's handle – seems to be attacking him mercilessly.

A line of children waiting there observe him, laughing when his broken umbrella spills more water on his head. Enoch glares and lowers his glasses, and then turns to face a life-size poster of Gonga the Gorilla, who is scheduled to appear in person at noon. Enoch is usually "thinking something else at the moment that Fate began drawing back her leg to kick him," as illustrated by a moment from his childhood when his father brought home a box of peanut brittle labeled A NUTTY SURPRISE!, from which a steel coil had sprung out and broken off Enoch's two front teeth. Unlike that time, Enoch now feels certain that fate is giving him an opportunity, and his reverence for the new jesus is restored. Insulting this ape will be his reward.

The laughing children reinforce the image of Enoch as an outsider, a clown. The anecdote from his childhood again uses Enoch's pain as a springboard for dark, slapstick comedy. That his father would have played this cruel joke is painful and tragic, but it again fits into the clown-like image of Enoch. O'Connor's metaphor seems to put him in the place of a dog being kicked by Fate, while trying only to follow the orders of his master, instinct, or something more – in this case, a belief in the new jesus. Something, this story suggests, is about to go wrong.

Enoch gets in line with the children, who start to engage him in discussion, but he grits his teeth and ignores them. After a few minutes, a black truck appears in the rain, and two men get out, cursing, and open the back door, telling the figure inside to "make it snappy." The phonograph announcing Gonga the Gorilla can barely be heard through the rain. At the men's insistence, a furry arm emerges from the truck, but draws back when it feels the rain. One of the men takes of his raincoat, cursing, and passes it into the truck. Gonga then emerges wearing the coat buttoned up all the way. Led by a chain, he takes his place on a small platform and growls, a black growl that terrifies Enoch—"if he had not been surrounded by children, he would have run away."

The children see Enoch as one of their own, which he resents. The scene painted by O'Connor of Gonga's emergence from the van, though, makes it clear that a mature observer should be able to see fairly easily through the ruse of this publicity stunt, glimpsing the truth behind the unconvincing disguise – and the fact that Enoch doesn't seem to suggests that he is more like the children than he wants to believe. He is just as terrified as any of them – more so – but is restrained by a sense of pride from running away.

The men call out for a brave child to shake Gonga's hand, reminding them that the first ten to shake his hand will earn a free movie pass. No one moves. Finally a fierce little girl steps up and shakes Gonga's hand, then another, then two boys. The line reforms, and Enoch gets closer and closer, panicking, unable to think of a suitable insult.

The bravery of the children exceeds Enoch's own, with the fierce little girl – who perhaps fits into the category of female characters that includes many of the waitresses Enoch encounters – leading the way. Enoch is panicked as his moment of destiny approaches, and the earlier story of the spring in the box suggests that something is about to go very wrong.

Then Enoch is shaking Gonga's warm, furry hand, and he realizes that it is the first time anyone has offered him their hand since he arrived in Taulkinham. Stammering, Enoch tells Gonga his name, that he attended Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy, that he works for the zoo and is only eighteen years old, and that he has seen two of Gonga's movies. Gonga leans in, and an ugly pair of human eyes stare at Enoch from behind an ape mask. Then Gonga tells him to go to hell, and jerks his hand away. Enoch is intensely humiliated, and he turns around three times, dazed, then runs off into the rain.

Completely starved for connection since arriving in this city, the lonely Enoch seizes this opportunity to engage with Gonga – and since Enoch doesn't really distinguish between humans and animals in his mind, he does so by recounting his life story. When Gonga leans in, Enoch first sees through the ruse – seeing the human eyes – and, realizing his mistake, is then disastrously rejected at his most vulnerable moment.

Enoch and his bundle are soaked by the time he reaches the Hawks' house, and he finds Sabbath Hawks in Hazel's room, where Hazel is lying ashen-faced with a washcloth over his eyes. Sabbath turns when Enoch scratches at the wall, and leads him into the hallway, telling him that "[her] man" is sick and sleeping, since he didn't sleep at all last night. Enoch gives her the bundle distrustfully, telling her it comes from a friend, and then insults her, needing some relief from his pain. He tells Sabbath that he can see why Hazel has to keep the washcloth over his eyes.

Sabbath, desperate and alone without Asa, has claimed possession over Hazel, and makes sure Enoch knows that they slept together the night before, marking her territory in a bestial way. Enoch then responds in his own habitual and instinctual fashion, with an insult. This insult—that Hazel prefers blindness over seeing Sabbath—resonates on a few levels. It relates to Hazel's frequent inability or refusal to see the truth in front of him, and also foreshadows what is to come.

Sabbath takes the bundle to the bathroom where there is better light, reflecting on Hazel's sickness. She thinks he is not really sick, just not used to her yet. She opens the package and stares, stunned, at the new jesus, seriously damaged after the journey. There is something familiar about him, and she begins to comb his hair and cradle him in her arms, pronouncing him "right cute." She asks him who his momma and daddy are, and then understands the answer to her own question with a short, pleased bark. She heads back to the room where Hazel is sleeping, hoping to give him a "jolt."

This is the culmination of Sabbath's fascination with children and their stories. Fate has now delivered her a "child" of her own, in a dark, twisted way, so that she becomes a sort of Madonna figure for the new jesus. The "bark" with which she decides that the mummy will be child to Hazel and herself, coming as it has directly on the heels of their union, again reminds us of her animal nature. Sabbath hopes this creature will be a means of securing Hazel's loyalty, and marking her own territory.

Hazel is awake in the room, dressing quickly, when he sees that Sabbath is not there. His one thought is of moving immediately to another city and preaching the Church Without Christ there. He would get another room and another woman and make a new start. All of this is possible because of his **car**, and the sight of it out the window gives Hazel the energy to finish dressing, drawing him out of the consumptive hollowness he had felt last night. As he packs his duffel bag with his few belongings, Hazel carefully avoids touching the Bible that still sits like a rock in the bottom of the bag. His hand pulls out the case with his mother's glasses. He puts them on, and the wall wavers slightly. He looks in the mirror and snaps his fingers nervously, seeing his mother's face in the reflection.

Meanwhile Hazel is plotting his escape, retreating from his descent into the animal world by dressing once again, and eager to carry on his mission somewhere else, to take his car – vehicle of his free will and independence – and spread the Church Without Christ in another city. The idea that he might regain some control over his life strengthens Hazel's will, even though the reminders of his past – and the religious destiny that was seeded in him there – are everywhere, as the Bible and glasses attest. When Hazel looks in the mirror and sees his mother, his fear of becoming like her seems realized.

Behind Hazel the door opens, and he turns to see a blurry pair of faces. Sabbath says "Call me Momma now," and she asks where "daddy" is going, and isn't he going to take them with him? Hazel stands motionless, his head thrust forward, and then he reaches out toward the little mummified creature, but he only grasps the air, as his depth perception is distorted by the glasses. He tries again, and then a third time, this time grabbing the little man and throwing him against the wall, so that his head pops off and the trash inside sprays out. Sabbath yells, as Hazel grabs what remains of the body, opens the door that drops into the backyard, and throws it out into the rain. Hazel leans out, his **hat** splattered with rain.

Unable to see clearly through his mother's prescription glasses, Hazel is confused at first – it may be that he believes the little mummy is a real baby. He feels desperately trapped in this moment by Sabbath, whose clutches he had hoped to escape. The dark comedy of his near-blind groping in the air is mixed with horror, as his near escape seems foiled, and he is beset by the animal need of Sabbath, his free will compromised along with his spiritual destiny. Hazel's reaction is violent, destroying Enoch's "new jesus."

Sabbath yells, in a rage, that she knew from the first time she saw Hazel that he was mean and evil, wicked enough to throw a baby against a wall, and that he wouldn't let himself or anyone else enjoy life since he wanted nothing but Jesus. Hazel gestures violently, almost falling out the door, and then tells Sabbath that he wants nothing but the truth. He tells her that he is leaving in the **car**, and that he will go to some other city and preach the Church Without Christ, the only truth there is. But then he coughs "like a little yell for help at the bottom of a canyon," which interrupts his shouting, and his face drains of color entirely. He throws the glasses out the door, and says he will leave after he gets more sleep. Sabbath tells him he "ain't going to get none."

Sabbath reacts as though Hazel had in fact killed their child, and reveals what she has seen at Hazel's core this whole time – what everyone sees but him – that he is mired in guilt, and his desperate need to escape his religious upbringing is in vain: it is his destiny. He begins to protest and assert his free will, leaning on the idea of the car, and a belief in the truth – but this blow has been too much, and he sinks down onto the bed, defeated. Sabbath hopes to take advantage of this to further enmesh Hazel there, so that he cannot leave her.

CHAPTER 12

Enoch feels sure that the new jesus will reward him in return for his service—he has Hope, which for him means "two parts suspicion and one part lust." He is not sure what he wants, but feels a basic ambition to better himself until he is the best—he wants to see a line of people waiting to shake *his* hand someday. Enoch sits in his room all afternoon, waiting, stripping off what remains from the old umbrella until all that is left is a sharpened stick with a carved dog's head on one end. He thinks it will "distinguish him on the sidewalk."

Enoch's quasi-religious faith in the mixture of fate and instinct that guides his life is—in opposition to the serious spirituality that Hazel deals in—distinctly primitive and animal. Enoch is lonely and wants to be accepted, even celebrated, like Gonga the Gorilla. The sharpened dog's-head cane foreshadows a bestial violence to come, but is also comical in Enoch's hand.

That evening Enoch takes the stick out with him to a little restaurant called the Paris Diner, with the nervous sense that he is going to receive an honor. The tall waitress, who doesn't like Enoch even though he comes in every night, takes his order: a chocolate malted milkshake and split pea soup. Instead of filling it, however, she starts to fry bacon for herself. Enoch tells her he is in a hurry, and she says "go then." He then changes his order to ask for a slice of the cake, and asks to be placed next to the only other customer there, a man who is reading the newspaper.

The small-town kitsch of the Paris Diner combines comically with Enoch's anticipation of reward and his childish food order. Another in the series of fierce waitresses in Enoch's life disrupts his attempt at a fine dining experience, and rejects his attempt to connect. He shifts his attentions to the other customer, still holding on to the hope of his religious reward.

Enoch sidles over to the other customer and asks if he might borrow a part of the paper. The man stares, and then hands him the comics section—Enoch's favorite. Enoch eats the cake and reads, filling up with "kindness and courage and strength." He then scans the movie ads on the back of the page, and sees a notice for Gonga's last appearance in the city at the Victory Theater. The light of inspiration strikes his face, as if he were "awakening." The waitress asks Enoch if he swallowed a seed. Enoch says goodbye, warning her that she might not see him again the way he is. She responds dismissively that any way she doesn't see him will be fine with her.

Although he complies with Enoch's request, the man's unfriendliness leaves him isolated. Enoch doesn't mind though, as he finds refuge in the comics that appeal to his childish personality, and fills up with a sense of virtue. Then, suddenly, his fateful moment strikes, as the reward that he deserves – another shot at Gonga – appears before him. Enoch persists in his failing attempt to forge a connection with the bristly waitress, but to no avail.

Enoch hurries through the pleasant dark streets of the city, enjoying the lights shining in the puddles and the junk in the steamy windows. He stops across from the Victory Theater and watches, flushed with envy, as a line of people steps up to shake Gonga's hand. Then Enoch darts into the back of the waiting black van. After the feature begins, the "gorilla" gets into the van, and his two "keepers" climb into the cab. They drive away quickly, and the drone of the motor drowns out the unusual thumping noises coming from the back of the van. At a railroad crossing, the van slows, and a small figure slips out the back door and limps into the woods.

With Enoch's hopeful mood, the streets of the city appear much friendlier than when he hurried through them in the rain. He is stalking his prey now, animal-like, as his jealousy at Gonga's many admirers – in stark contrast to his own situation, where no one seems able to stand him – grows and grows. O'Connor doesn't show us the violence taking place in the back of the van, but the result is clear enough: Enoch has murdered the man behind the mask.

In a thicket of pine, the figure lays down the pointed stick and something bulky he had been carrying. He undresses and folds each garment neatly into a stack. Then he digs a hole with the sharp stick. The moon reveals him to be Enoch, his face scratched and with one lump under the eye. He is burning with intense happiness, as he buries the stack of clothes in the trench he has dug. He does this not as a symbol of burying his past self, but because he won't need them anymore. He takes up the bulky object from the ground and one by one his limbs vanish until he is replaced by a black, shaggy figure—for a moment it has two heads, one light and one dark, and then Enoch pulls on the gorilla costume head, adjusts a few secret straps, and is transformed.

The figure, still unnamed, steals into the forest like an animal. His last actions as a human are careful and measured, as he carefully folds his clothing and buries them, stripping off his humanity. Enoch's joy is complete and instinctive – finally fate has rewarded him for carefully following the instructions of his wise blood. The object is revealed to be Gonga's gorilla costume, and now Enoch gradually disappears within it. His head is the last to go, as the human within him is subsumed by the animal in a natural climax of his journey so far.

For a while he is still, and then Enoch begins to growl, beating his chest and jumping up and down. He practices shaking hands in the air, and then leaves the woods with the pointy stick under his arm at a cocky angle. "No gorilla in existence," whether in the jungles of Africa or the richest apartment in New York, is happier than this one, "whose god had finally rewarded it."

The transformation is complete, as the inner conflict – between human and animal – that existed in Enoch is replaced with a pure animal existence. He IS a gorilla in this moment, at least in his mind and in O'Connor's description – even as Enoch misunderstands what exactly a gorilla is, or where it might live. This is an ascendant, religious moment for Enoch.

A man and a woman are sitting on a rock, looking out over the city. The man turns and sees the gorilla standing there with its arm outstretched, as if offering a handshake. He eases his arm from around the woman and disappears into the woods. The woman turns, sees the gorilla waiting, and flees screaming. Surprised, the gorilla lets its arm fall to its side and sits down on the rock, staring out over the valley at the uneven skyline.

Here, the ever-lonely Enoch attempts to complete his joy by imitating what he has seen Gonga do with such envy: shake hands with other people, finally finding connection and admiration. Of course, the man and woman flee from the confused Enoch, while also abandoning one another—a move typical of the grotesque, selfish morals of many of the citizens of Taulkinham.

CHAPTER 13

On his first night with the false Prophet, Hoover Shoats earns fifteen dollars and thirty-five cents. Three dollars go to the "Prophet" for his services and use of his **car**. The impostor's name is Solace Layfield, and he has consumption and six children. He never considers that the job of Prophet might be dangerous, and he doesn't noticed the rat-colored car parked a half block from them on the second night, or the white face watching him "with the kind of intensity that means something is going to happen no matter what is done to keep it from happening."

These logistical details – and the success that Shoats is having, in contrast to Hazel's failure – emphasize the appeal of the kind of false, hollow religion he preaches. Solace is a pitiful figure, and his sad life story inspires sympathy in the face of the misfortune that seems about to befall his. This white face—Hazel's—is determined beyond any doubt, and so Solace's sad fate is set.

Hazel's face watches Shoats and the "Prophet" for an hour, and then his **car** follows Solace's while he drops off Shoats and carries on to his own home. As Solace turns off the main road, Hazel gradually comes closer, until he suddenly rams the back of Solace's car with his own. Solace gets out of his car and asks Hazel what he wants. In response, Hazel rams the other car again, so that it rolls into the ditch. Solace runs back to his window, and Hazel asks why he keeps a car like that on the road. Solace insists that there is nothing wrong with his car.

Now it is Hazel who is stalking his prey, although his method is deliberate, serious, and premeditated, unlike Enoch's. Suspense builds on the journey home, and then violence erupts – first against the car, which represents an attack on the vehicle of Hazel's free will, and the closest thing he has to a home. Hazel insults Solace's car, which exactly resembles his own, and Solace echoes the obviously false response that Hazel has given many times: it's a good car. Blind to his own faults, Hazel sees them all too clearly when they are embodied by Solace.

Hazel tells him to take off the **hat**. Beginning to cough, Solace asks him to stop staring and say what he wants. Hazel replies "you ain't true," asking why he gets up on the car and preaches what he doesn't believe in. He repeats his question, and finally Solace responds that "A man has to look out for hisself." "You ain't true," says Haze, "You believe in Jesus." Then he tells Solace again to take off the suit and hat. Solace says he isn't trying to mock Hazel, but Hazel reaches out and knocks off the hat.

Hazel's wild, tight rage against Solace's dishonesty and belief in Jesus mirrors his anger at the car's ugliness – he sees in Solace all of the things he fears are true in himself, but refuses to believe. The rage he feels is self-hating, fueled by guilt and an inability to accept the truth of his destiny, of the religious feelings he cannot escape. Hazel wants to destroy Solace, since he reminds him of his own failures.

Solace begins to walk away down the middle of the road, and Hazel starts the **car**, yelling at him to take off the suit. Solace begins to pull it off as he lopes down the road, and he starts to run as Hazel's car comes forward more rapidly. As Solace takes off his trousers and starts grabbing for his shoes, Hazel's car knocks him flat and runs him over. Hazel then reverses and drives back over the body again. He steps out of the car and stands over Solace, telling him that there are two things he can't stand: "a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is." Solace, wheezing, tries to say something, and Hazel squats down to hear him. Solace is confessing his sins before dying, and Hazel leans closer to hear even as he tells him repeatedly to shut up. As Solace wheezes "Jesus hep me," Hazel slaps him in the back, hard, and Solace stops breathing. Hazel cleans off the **blood** from the front of his car and leaves.

The dark, tragic comedy of poor Solace stripping while he runs down the road only adds to the horror of his death. The enraged Hazel, still unaware that what he hates most in this man is true of himself as well, denounces him as a liar and a fake. Hazel's inner conflict continues, as on the one hand he leans in, priest-like, to hear the confession of the dying Solace, and on the other hand he tells him to shut up. He is dismayed to see this fearful belief, this guilt, this desperate need for redemption in a man who is a mirror of himself. Unable to let himself hear the confession any longer, to believe that he too might have this guilt in him, Hazel finishes the job and coldly leaves.

Early the next morning Hazel drives to a filling station to get the car ready for his trip. He has spent the night in the car, in an alley. He tells the sleepy attendant that he wants the car prepared, and when the boy expresses doubt that it will make the journey, Hazel tells him that "nobody with a good car needed to worry about anything." He follows the boy around the car while he does the work, telling him about the Church Without Christ—that one can only believe in what can be seen or held or tested with one's teeth, and that he used to believe in blasphemy but not any longer, since that required believing in something to blaspheme. Then Hazel begins to blaspheme Jesus in a quiet and intense way, so that the boy pauses to listen.

Back to his blind refusal to look the truth of his life in the face, Hazel persists in his false confidence about the state of his car—and the state of his independence from the religious destiny that follows him at every step. Even as a little awareness of the hypocrisy at the core of his belief in blasphemy creeps in – to believe in blasphemy, one must believe in Jesus – Hazel does not stop his intense litany of curses, not seeing the double standard right in front of him. He believes, and cannot escape that fact.

Finishing his work, the boy tells Hazel that there is a leak in the gas tank and two in the radiator, and the rear tire might last twenty miles if he goes slow. Hazel responds that the **car** is just beginning its life, and a bolt of lightning couldn't stop it. Then he drives away, leaving a trail of water and oil on the road. He drives very fast out of town, but has the sense that he isn't going anywhere. At one point he sees a sign that says "Jesus Died for YOU." Hazel deliberately avoids reading it.

Once more in front of his eyes, letting himself be blinded to the reality of his broken-down car and his own inner conflict, Hazel attempts yet again to flee, leaving a comic trail of oil behind him. His destiny won't leave him alone, though, as the sign – a direct echo of what his grandfather used to say – calls him out. To deliberately avoid reading it, after already having done so, is a comic contradiction.

Five miles down the highway Hazel is pulled over by a policeman, who tells Hazel that he pulled him over because he doesn't like his face. He asks Hazel for his license. Hazel tells the policeman that he doesn't like *his* face either, and he doesn't have a license. The policeman asks Hazel to drive to the top of a nearby hill to see the view, and Hazel assumes he wants to fight. He obligingly drives the **car** up to the top of the hill, and turns it toward the embankment as the cop suggests. The cop then tells Hazel that he will be able to see better from outside the car, so he steps out, looking out over the pasture thirty feet below, where a lone cow sits. From behind, the patrolman pushes Hazel's car over the embankment, and it falls into the pasture, landing on its top. The cow gallops away.

Like the policeman who stopped Hazel for jaywalking earlier in the novel, this officer is confrontational and predatory, and Hazel responds in kind, his animal instincts raised. As blind as ever to the obvious around him, Hazel naively follows the policeman's instruction to drive his car right up to the embankment at the top of the hill and step out. Then comes the act of random, unwarranted, shallow violence that finally pushes Hazel over the edge, as his car – the last vestige of independence he had refused to let go – is destroyed.

Hazel stands silently looking out at the pasture and into the gray sky, his face reflecting a great distance. Then his knees buckle, and he sits on the edge of the embankment. The policeman asks if he can give Hazel a ride to where he was going, but Hazel remains silent. He asks again, and then a third time, this time more anxiously. Hazel says no. His face is concentrated on the space ahead of him. Confused, the policeman goes back to his car, says goodbye to Hazel, and drives away.

Hazel is broken by the unmotivated cruelty of this act (although it's a cruelty that echoes his own murder of Solace), so much so that the policeman begins to feel some guilt and concern. Something has changed in Hazel now, putting him far beyond the reach of the policeman, isolating him once and for all from the world of the primitive, animal-like people of Taulkinham. In this moment Hazel has resigned himself to his destiny, and this is the beginning of his punishment for the sin he committed.

After a while Hazel stands up and walks back to town. It takes three hours. On the way he buys a sack of lime and a tin bucket, and when he reaches the house he fills the bucket with lime and water. His landlady, Mrs. Flood, asks what he is doing, and he tells her he is going to blind himself. She doesn't understand why someone who felt that bad wouldn't just commit suicide, and can't understand why anyone would blind themselves. For a moment she confronts the idea that when she dies, she too will be blind, but then she clears her mind. She is not a morbid or religious person, but has some respect for those who are that way. She does not doubt that Hazel will blind himself—there is something a little bit off about all preachers, after all. What else could explain why someone wouldn't want to enjoy themselves?

Hazel's resignation is complete now, his pace deliberate. Unlike Asa, his moment of blinding is not announced ahead of time to induce conversions – there is no fanfare, only a quiet, dark conviction, as Hazel prepares to complete the act that Asa was unable to carry through to its conclusion. He is withdrawing from the world, and opening himself up to the inner truths he had chosen to ignore – his destiny, and his belief in God and sin. As the perspective switches to Mrs. Flood, her lack of surprise again illustrates how this conviction has always been visible to everyone but Hazel. He has always lacked joy, always been mired in guilt. The switch of perspective also emphasizes Hazel's new disconnection—not even the narrator has access to his inner life anymore.

CHAPTER 14

This question—what would drive someone to blind themselves—stays with Mrs. Flood, because Hazel does indeed blind himself, and she is constantly reminded of this fact by his scars, since he refuses to wear dark glasses. He is a silent houseguest, but offers to pay extra to keep his room, since he knows the space. She accepts, still curious about the blind man. She knows that he receives a disability check from the government, and feels justified getting back any of the money she feels has been stolen from her as taxes. She feels like the blind Hazel has the "look of seeing something," so that even though he is blind it always seems as though he is straining forward to see something distant.

O'Connor's perspective continues to follow Mrs. Flood here, giving the reader a glimpse at the inner life of this lonely landlady. Her moral logic for charging Hazel higher rent is unapologetically self-centered, but in what seems to be a fairly harmless way. She is drawn in by an unquenchable curiosity about what secret truth Hazel seems to know, what spiritual knowledge justified his blinding himself, and what exactly goes on inside his mind, behind his scarred eyes that seem to see something. Just as we began with Mrs. Hitchcock's confused impressions of Hazel, so we end with Mrs. Flood's.

The other boarders largely ignore Hazel now, although at first they had been afraid of him. When he blinded himself, Sabbath had run to everyone to tell them what happened. She left a few days later, saying that she had not counted on him being an "honest-to-Jesus blind man," and that she missed her father, Asa. Two months later Sabbath returned, shouting and screaming. Mrs. Flood told Hazel he would have to pay double if she stayed, so he did. When Mrs. Flood warns him that Sabbath is only after his money, Hazel says that if she were, he would pay her to leave. The landlady arranges to have Sabbath put into a Welfare home.

O'Connor is pitiless in portraying how Hazel's life has had little effect on the world around him, but his blinding, at least, has a nagging effect on the curious Mrs. Flood. Sabbath does not know how to respond to this dark act, which reverses the cowardice of Asa, replacing it with a merciless conviction. Hazel demonstrates in his response to Mrs. Flood and Sabbath's requests of him that he cares nothing for money or attachment, and wants only to be left alone.

Later, Mrs. Flood steams open the envelope containing Hazel's government check, and raises his rent when she finds out how much is there. She starts to cook his meals for him as well, and to charge for board. She can't shake the feeling that he is cheating her somehow. He must have had some plan when he blinded himself, so what does he know that she doesn't? Mrs. Flood tries to find out more about Hazel, telling him that her people are all dead, and she supposes his are too. He says that yes, they are.

Mrs. Flood's subtle swindling of the blind Hazel is automatic more than it is malicious. Even though she is the one cheating him, her conviction that there is something that is being hidden will not be shaken. Her curiosity begins to grow into an obsession, as she finds common ground between them: both are alone in the world, their whole families having died already.

Mrs. Flood enjoys sitting on the porch with Hazel, although she cannot always tell if he knows she is there. She talks at length, but he rarely responds. If she forgets to stop herself she begins to stare into his damaged eyes, mouth open. "Anyone who saw her from the sidewalk would think she was being courted by a corpse." She notes that he never eats much, and he doesn't care what it is he eats. His cough deepens with time, and his limp worsens. Hazel spends half the day walking around in a five-block radius from the house, even in winter when he is sick. Mrs. Flood reflects that he might as well be "one of those monks" in a "monkery." She still feels vaguely cheated, as she wants to understand everything.

The lonely Mrs. Flood begins to take on Hazel as her chief companion, although the relationship seems very one-sided – another example from O'Connor of the ease with which people can create illusions for themselves. Hazel is growing gradually weaker, and seems unattached to anything in his life except for routine – this leads to Mrs. Flood's remark that he ought to live in a "monkery." Hazel seems resigned now to a quiet, arguably religious life, although now it is as hard for the reader to see inside his mind as it is for Mrs. Flood.

Mrs. Flood reflects on what is inside Hazel's head, and decides that it must be big enough to contain everything, the whole world and sky and planets, making what is outside seem tiny—but it is the opposite for her. Mrs. Flood has to imagine Hazel's dark inner world as containing a pinprick of light, like the star on Christmas cards, and laughs when she imagines him going "backwards to Bethlehem." She wants to find something to give him a connection to the real world, and suggests that he take up the guitar, creating a vision of the two of them sitting on the porch while he strums. He never takes her suggestion.

There is something different about Hazel, and there always has been: he is fated for the spiritual life, set apart in some way from the mundane, animal world of Mrs. Flood and the citizens of Taulkinham. Hazel has now embraced this destiny and retreated further into this spiritualism, withdrawing from the world altogether. Mrs. Flood feels a deep curiosity about his spiritual quest, combined with a comic desire to tease him away from it.

Mrs. Flood wonders what happens with the extra third of Hazel's benefit check. She knows that it goes unused, and thinks of what benefits a widow of his might accrue. One day she finds four dollars and some change in his wastebasket, and when she asks him why they're there, he says they were left over. She is shocked by this waste, asking why he doesn't at least give it away. He tells her that she can have it.

Here the idea of marrying Hazel begins to enter Mrs. Flood's practical mind. The episode with the wastebasket, which truly shocks her, cements the fact that Hazel is now living completely apart from the world, in a monk-like, ascetic way. He is no longer looking to escape anything, but has resigned himself to suffering.

Mrs. Flood decides, officially, to marry Hazel, so that he is under the control of "a sensible person." In order to seduce him, she tries to take an interest in what matters to him: preaching. She asks why he doesn't preach anymore, suggesting that a seeing-eye dog would certainly draw a crowd. She tells him that, personally, she is just as good with Jesus as without, and he interjects to say that she is better without. She takes this as a compliment, and tells him he should continue preaching, but he says he has no time.

Mrs. Flood's project of seducing the completely withdrawn Hazel is tragic and comic at once. Hazel's answer to her statement about Jesus, as well as his assertion that she is better off without him, is a sign that even as he has given in to his destiny, Hazel continues to envy the people who can enjoy life without guilt and the self-hatred that accompanies it.

Later Mrs. Flood discovers what is taking Hazel's time, and why he limps. Cleaning his room one day, she finds that his shoes are full of bits of rock and glass. Confused, she asks him why he walks on rocks, and he responds, harshly, "to pay." When she asks "for what," Hazel says it doesn't make any difference, and to mind her own business, because she "can't see." Mrs. Flood asks him whether he thinks that when you're dead, you're blind, and Hazel says that he hopes so, because "if there's no bottom in your eyes, they hold more."

The mystery of Hazel's routine is revealed at last—he has returned to the self-harm that we first witnessed in his story about seeing the naked woman at the carnival. Hazel has now devoted his life to paying for his sins with self-inflicted pain and punishment. It's unclear if this is a search for redemption and freedom, however, or merely Hazel enacting what he sees as an inexorable justice. Hazel's assertion suggests that he can see a greater truth now that he is blinded, and has left behind all of the self-deception and hypocrisy of his earlier life. This statement also echoes Hawks' earlier one—although Hazel has real conviction and blindness behind his claim.

Mrs. Flood becomes obsessed by Hazel, following him on his walks and badgering him about his health. He didn't seem to notice her, or else swats at her voice as if it were a mosquito. For a while he stops eating at the boarding house, going to a nearby restaurant instead, and she is dismayed. Soon enough Hazel catches influenza, however, and is too weak to walk out. One day she walks in on him sleeping, and sees barbed wire wrapped around his chest, through his open shirt. Mrs. Flood is so shocked by this that she drops a tray of dishes.

Mrs. Flood becomes one more thing for Hazel to endure, one more trial, even as she tries to help and understand him and his dark religious purpose. His self-harm is more serious than Mrs. Flood knew at first, and the revelation of the barbed wire truly shakes her – what is it that she doesn't understand, that could drive him to do this awful thing to himself? He is moving beyond her, and beyond the world.

Mrs. Flood wakes Hazel and asks why he does these "unnatural" things. He says that they *are* natural. She says that it's something people have quit doing, "like boiling in oil or being a saint." He says that "they ain't quit doing it as long as I'm doing it," and that he does it because he is "not clean." She agrees, pointing out that he has **bloodied** his shirt and the sheets, but he says it's "not that kind of clean." Mrs. Flood mutters that there is "only one kind of clean," and begins to sweep up the broken dishes. She tells Hazel that he must have been lying about not believing in Jesus, that she wouldn't be surprised if he were some kind of agent of the pope.

Mrs. Flood's animal instinct is for self-preservation, and so for her Hazel's actions are unnatural, but his instincts, and the fate he cannot escape, have always been spiritual and somehow elevated. Hazel seems like he belongs to another time, one when saints walked the earth—not what O'Connor portrays as a modern, shallow age. Hazel's actions are driven by a guilty need for redemption that Mrs. Flood cannot even begin to understand – she is the kind of person that Hazel wanted so desperately to be, someone who only understands "clean" in the physical sense.

At first Mrs. Flood had planned to marry Hazel and then commit him to the insane asylum, but now she plans to keep him. She has grown used to watching his face and trying to see what is really behind his eyes. One day, the coldest of that winter, she goes to his room and makes the proposition, gradually suggesting that it would be easier for them both if she didn't have to climb the stairs up to his room, and if he moved in with her. As she speaks, Hazel begins to put on his clothes: his faded suit, the panama **hat**, and finally his rock-filled shoes. Mrs. Flood finishes her speech, saying that nobody ought to be without a place to be in this empty world. She says that she will give him a home. Hazel walks slowly towards her and then past her, into the hall and down the stairs.

Even as Hazel's actions mystify her more and more, Mrs. Flood is determined to keep him around so that she can unlock the secret motivations behind them. Her proposal is practical and gentle, but Hazel is clearly struck with a deep need to escape, as she is trying to draw him back out of himself and down into the world of other people, with their mundanity and animal nature. Hazel dresses in his preacher's clothes and silently rejects her offer of a home, the thing that, at the novel's beginning, he claimed to be looking for. Mrs. Flood offers comfort against the world's loneliness, but Hazel embraces that loneliness, choosing truth over happiness.

As Hazel leaves, Mrs. Flood tells him that there's no other place for him to go. She's sure he will return. That night, as the icy wind blows, Mrs. Flood starts to weep, wanting to run out into the storm and find Hazel, to tell him that the two of them could go wherever he is going together. She is old, and has had a hard life, and deserves a friend. If she was going to be blind when she was dead, then who better to lead her than a blind man? At dawn she goes out looking for Hazel, and alerts the police when he is nowhere to be found.

Mrs. Flood has been transformed by her exposure to the spiritually intense Hazel, and she is more aware of her loneliness and unhappiness than she ever has been before. She now recognizes that there might be something missing from her life – some secret realm or afterlife to which Hazel holds the key, something to stave off the fear of death that is beginning to gnaw at her.

Two days later a pair of young, fat, blond policemen find Hazel lying in a ditch. They tell him that he needs to come with them and pay his rent. Barely conscious, Hazel tells them he wants to go on where he is going. The fatter cop hits him over the head with his new billy club so that he won't be any trouble. Hazel dies in the back of the squad **car**, but the policemen don't notice, and they deliver his corpse to Mrs. Flood.

More in the line of nasty authority figures, these cruel and grotesque policemen find the weakened Hazel and accidentally kill him, in an act of violence that is tragically quiet and careless. Hazel seems to want to die, however. He craves release from the world that treated him so poorly, and which is so unclean in his eyes.

Mrs. Flood has the policemen lay Hazel on her bed, and she tells his tranquil, empty face that he can stay rent-free now, or they can go on somewhere else, together. She leans closer, peering into his empty sockets, trying to decipher how she has been cheated. Closing her own eyes, she sees the pinpoint of light, far away. Her eyes still shut, she "stares" into Hazel's eyes, and watches as he moves farther and farther away, until he becomes the pinpoint of light.

Finally Hazel seems to have found peace, in death. Mrs. Flood has been left behind, alone, and now convinced that there is some secret within Hazel that she cannot attain. She takes the first step to the truth by closing her eyes, cutting herself off from the world like Hazel did, and watches in her mind's eye as his soul retreats into the afterlife, fulfilling his destiny after a life of isolation and suffering.

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