

Flannery O'Connor

THE PEELER\*

Hazel Motes walked along downtown, close to the store fronts but not looking at them. His neck was thrust forward as if he were trying to smell something that was always being drawn away. He had on a blue suit that was glare-blue in the day time, but looked purplish with the night lights on it, and his hat was a fierce black wool hat like a preacher's hat. The stores in Taulkinham stayed open on Thursday nights and a lot of people were shopping. Haze's shadow was now behind him and now before him and now and then broken up by other people's shadows, but when it was by itself, stretching behind him, it was a thin nervous shadow walking backwards.

After a while he stopped where a lean-faced man had a card table set up in front of a Lerner's Dress Shop and was demonstrating a potato peeler. The man had on a small canvas hat and a shirt patterned with bunches of upsidedown pheasants and quail and bronze turkeys. He was pitching his voice under the street noises so that it reached every ear distinctly as in a private conversation. A few people gathered around. There were two buckets on the card table, one empty and the other full of potatoes. Between the two buckets there was a pyramid of green cardboard boxes and on top of the stack, one peeler was open for demonstration. The man stood in front of this altar, pointing over it at different people. "How about you?" he said, pointing at a damp-haired pimpled boy, "you ain't gonna let one of these go by?" He stuck a brown potato in one side of the open machine. The machine was a square tin box with a red handle, and as he turned the handle, the potato went into the box and then in a second, backed out the other side, white. "You ain't gonna let one of these go by!" he said.

The boy guffawed and looked at the other people gathered around. He had yellow slick hair and a fox-shaped face.

\* This is a chapter from a novel in progress.

"What's yer name?" the peeler man asked.

"Name Enoch Emery," the boy said and snuffled.

"Boy with a pretty name like that ought to have one of these," the man said, rolling his eyes, trying to warm up the others. Nobody laughed but the boy. Then a man standing across from Hazel Motes laughed. He was a tall man with light green glasses and a black suit and a black wool hat like a preacher's hat, and he was leaning on a white cane. The laugh sounded as if it came from something tied up in a croker sack. It was evident he was a blind man. He had his hand on the shoulder of a big-boned child with a black knitted cap pulled down low on her forehead and a fringe of orange hair sticking out from it on either side. She had a long face and a short sharp nose. The people began to look at the two of them instead of the man selling peelers. This irritated the man selling peelers. "How about you, you there," he said, pointing at Hazel Motes. "You'll never be able to get a bargain like this in any store."

"Hey!" Enoch Emery said, reaching across a woman and punching Haze's arm. "He's talking to you! He's talking to you!" Haze was looking at the blind man and the child. Enoch Emery had to punch him again.

"Whyn't you take one of these home to yer wife?" the peeler man was saying.

"I ain't none," Haze muttered without drawing his attention from the blind man.

"Well, you got a dear old mother, ain't you?"

"No."

"Well shaw," the man said, with his hand cupped to the people, "he needs one theseyer just to keep him company."

Enoch Emery thought that was so funny that he doubled over and slapped his knee, but Hazel Motes didn't look as if he had heard it yet. "I'm going to give away half a dozen peeled potatoes to the first person purchasing one theseyer machines," the man said. "Who's gonna step up first? Only a dollar and a half for a machine'd cost you three dollars in any store!" Enoch Emery began fumbling in his pockets. "You'll thank the day you ever stopped here," the man said, "you'll never forget it. Ever one of you people purchasing one theseyer machines'll never forget it."

The blind man began to move straight forward suddenly and

the peeler man got ready to hand him one of the green boxes, but he went past the card table and turned, moving at a right angle back in among the people. He was handing something out. Then Haze saw that the child was moving around too, giving out white leaflets. There were not many people gathered there, but the ones who were began to move off. When the machine-seller saw this, he leaned, glaring, over the card table. "Hey you!" he yelled at the blind man, "what you think you doing? Who you think you are, running people off from here?"

The blind man didn't pay him any mind. He kept on handing out the pamphlets. He handed one at Enoch Emery and then he came toward Haze, hitting the white cane at an angle from his leg.

"What the hell you think you doing?" the man selling peelers yelled. "I got these people together, how you think you can horn in?"

The blind man had a peculiar boiled looking red face. He thrust one of the pamphlets a little to the side of Haze and Haze grabbed it. It was a tract. The words on the outside of it said, "Jesus Calls You."

"I'd like to know who the hell you think you are!" the man with the peelers was yelling. The child passed the card table again and handed him a tract. He looked at it for an instant with his lip curled, and then he charged around the card table, upsetting the bucket of potatoes. "These damm Jesus fanatics," he yelled, glaring around, trying to find the blind man. More people had gathered, hoping to see a disturbance, and the blind man had disappeared among them. "These goddam Communist Jesus Foreigners!" the peeler man screamed. "I got this crowd together!" He stopped, realizing there was a crowd.

"Listen folks," he said, "one at a time, there's plenty to go around, just don't push, a half dozen peeled potatoes to the first person stepping up to buy." He got back behind the card table quietly and started holding up the peeler boxes. "Step on up, plenty to go around," he said, "no need to crowd."

Hazel Motes didn't open his tract. He looked at the outside of it and then he tore it across. He put the two pieces together and tore them across again. He kept restacking the pieces and tearing them again until he had a little handful of confetti. He turned his hand over and let the shredded leaflet sprinkle to the ground. Then he

looked up and saw the blind man's child not three feet away, watching him. Her mouth was open and her eyes glittered on him like two chips of green bottle glass. She had on a black dress and there was a white gunny sack hung over her shoulder. Haze scowled and began rubbing his sticky hands on his pants.

"I seen you," she said. Then she moved quickly over to where the blind man was standing now, beside the card table. Most of the people had moved off.

The peeler man leaned over the card table and said, "Hey!" to the blind man. "I reckon that showed you. Trying to horn in." But the blind man stood there with his chin tilted back slightly as if he saw something over their heads.

"Lookerhere," Enoch Emery said, "I ain't got but a dollar sixteen cent but I . . ."

"Yah," the man said, as if he were going to make the blind man see him, "I reckon that'll show you you can't muscle in on me. Sold eight peelers, sold. . . ."

"Give me one of them," the child said, pointing to the peelers.

"Hanh?" he said.

She reached in her pocket and drew out a long coin purse and opened it. "Give me one of them," she said, holding out two fifty cent pieces.

The man eyed the money with his mouth hiked on one side. "A buck fifty, sister," he said.

She pulled her hand in quickly and all at once glared around at Hazel Motes as if he had made a noise at her. The blind man was moving off. She stood a second glaring red-faced at Haze and then she turned and followed the blind man. Haze started suddenly.

"Listen," Enoch Emery said, "I ain't got but a dollar sixteen cent and I want me one of them. . . ."

"You can keep it," the man said, taking the bucket off the card table. "This ain't no cut-rate joint."

Hazel Motes stood staring after the blind man, jerking his hands in and out of his pockets. He looked as if he were trying to move forward and backward at the same time. Then suddenly he thrust two bills at the man selling peelers and snatched a box off the card table and started down the street. In just a second Enoch Emery was panting at his elbow.

"My, I reckon you got a heap of money," Enoch Emery said. Haze turned the corner and saw them about a block ahead of him. Then he slowed down some and saw Enoch Emery there. Enoch had on a yellowish white suit and a pinkish white shirt and his tie was a greenpeaish color. He was grinning. He looked like a friendly hound dog with light mange. "How long you been here?" he inquired.

"Two days," Haze muttered.

"I been here two months," Enoch said. "I work for the city. Where you work?"

"Not working," Haze said.

"That's too bad," Enoch said. "I work for the city." He skipped a step to get in line with Haze, then he said, "I'm eighteen year old and I ain't been here but two months and I already work for the city."

"That's fine," Haze said. He pulled his hat down farther on the side Enoch Emery was on and walked faster.

"I didn't ketch your name good," Enoch said.

Haze said his name.

"You look like you might be follering them hicks," Enoch remarked. "You go in for a lot of Jesus?"

"No," Haze said.

"No, me neither, not much," Enoch agreed. "I went to thisyer Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy for four weeks. Thisyer woman that traded me from my daddy she sent me; she was a Welfare woman. Jesus, four weeks and I thought I was gonna be sanctified crazy."

Haze walked to the end of the block and Enoch stayed all the time at his elbow, panting and talking. When Haze started across the street, Enoch yelled, "Don't you see theter light! That means you got to wait!" A cop blew a whistle and a car blasted its horn and stopped short. Haze went on across, keeping his eyes on the blind man in the middle of the block. The policeman kept blowing the whistle. He crossed the street over to where Haze was and stopped him. He had a thin face and oval-shaped yellow eyes.

"You know what that little thing hanging up there is for?" he asked, pointing to the traffic light over the intersection.

"I didn't see it," Haze said.

The policeman looked at him without saying anything. A few people stopped. He rolled his eyes at them. "Maybe you thought the

red ones was for white folks and the green ones for colored," he said.

"Yeah, I thought that," Haze said. "Take your hand off me."

The policeman took his hand off and put it on his hip. He backed one step away and said, "You tell all your friends about these lights. Red is to stop, green is to go—men and women, white folks and niggers, all go on the same light. You tell all your friends so when they come to town, they'll know." The people laughed.

"I'll look after him," Enoch Emery said, pushing in by the policeman. "He ain't been here but only two days; I'll look after him."

"How long you been here?" the cop asked.

"I was born and raised here," Enoch said. "This is my ole home town. I'll take care of him for you. Hey wait!" he yelled at Haze. "Wait on me!" He pushed out the crowd and caught up with him. "I reckon I saved you that time," he said.

"I'm obliged," Haze said.

"It wasn't nothing," Enoch said. "Why don't we go in Walgreen's and get us a soda? Ain't no nightclubs open this early."

"I don't like no drugstores," Haze said. "Goodby."

"That's all right," Enoch said. "I reckon I'll go along and keep you company for a while." He looked up ahead at the couple and said, "I sho wouldn't want to get messed up with no hicks this time of night, particularly the Jesus kind. I done had enough of them myself. Thisyer woman that traded me from my daddy didn't do nothing but pray. Me and daddy, we moved around with a sawmill where we worked and it set up outside Boonville one summer and here come thisyer woman." He caught hold of Haze's coat. "Only objection I got to Taulkinham is there's too many people on the streets," he said confidentially, "look like they ain't satisfied until they knock you down—well, here she come and I reckon she took a fancy to me. I was twelve year old and I could sing some hymns good I learnt off a nigger. So here she comes taking a fancy to me and traded me off my daddy and took me to Boonville to live with her. She had a brick house but it was Jesus all day long." While he was talking he was looking up at Haze, studying his face. All of a sudden he bumped into a little man lost in a pair of faded overalls. "Whyn't you look where you going?" he growled.

The little man stopped short and raised his arm in a vicious

gesture and a mean dog look came on his face. "Who you tellin what?" he snarled.

"You see," Enoch said, jumping to catch up with Haze, "all they want to do is knock you down. I ain't never been to such a unfriendly place before. Even with that woman. I stayed with her for two months in that house of hers," he went on, "and then come fall she sent me to the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy and I thought that sho was gonna be some relief. This woman was hard to get along with—she wasn't old, I reckon she was forty year old—but she sho was ugly. She had theseyer brown glasses and her hair was so thin it looked like ham gravy trickling over her skull. I thought it was gonna be some certain relief to get to that Academy. I had run away oncet on her and she got me back and come to find out she had papers on me and she could send me to the penitentiary if I didn't stay with her so I sho was glad to get to theter Academy. You ever been to a academy?"

Haze didn't seem to hear the question. He still had his eye on the blind man in the next block.

"Well, it won't no relief," Enoch said. "Good Jesus, it won't no relief. I run away from there after four weeks and durn if she didn't get me back and brought me to that house of hers again. I got out though." He waited a minute. "You want to know how?"

After a second he said, "I scared hell out of that woman, that's how. I studied on it and studied on it. I even prayed. I said, 'Jesus, show me the way to get out of here without killing thisyer woman and getting sent to the penitentiary.' And durn if He didn't. I got up one morning at just daylight and I went in her room without my pants on and pulled the sheet off her and giver a heart attackt. Then I went back to my daddy and we ain't seen hide of her since.

"Your jaw just crawls," he observed, watching the side of Haze's face. "You don't never laugh. I wouldn't be surprised if you wasn't a real wealthy man."

Haze turned down a side street. The blind man and the girl were on the corner a block ahead.

"Well, I reckon we gonna ketch up with em after all," Enoch said. "Ain't that girl ugly, though? You seen them shoes she has on? Men's shoes, looks like. You know many people here?"

"No," Haze said.

"You ain't gonna know none neither. This is one more hard place to make friends in. I been here two months and I don't know nobody, look like all they want to do is knock you down. I reckon you got a right heap of money," he said. "I ain't got none. Had, I'd sho know what to do with it." The man and the girl stopped on the corner and turned up the left side of the street. "We catching up," he said. "I bet we'll be at some meeting singing hymns with her and her daddy if we don't watch out."

Up in the next block there was a large building with columns and a dome. The blind man and the child were going toward it. There was a car parked in every space around the building and on the other side the street and up and down the streets near it. "That ain't no picture show," Enoch said. The blind man and the girl turned up the steps to the building. The steps went all the way across the front, and on either side there were stone lions sitting on pedestals. "Ain't no church," Enoch said. Haze stopped at the steps. He looked as if he were trying to settle his face into an expression. He pulled the black hat forward at a nasty angle and started toward the two, who had sat down in the corner by one of the lions.

As they came nearer the blind man leaned forward as if he were listening to the footsteps, then he stood up, holding a tract out in his hand.

"Sit down," the child said in a loud voice. "It ain't nobody but them two boys."

"Nobody but us," Enoch Emery said. "Me and him been follerin you all about a mile."

"I knew somebody was following me," the blind man said. "Sit down."

"They ain't here for nothing but to make fun," the child said. She looked as if she smelled something bad. The blind man was feeling out to touch them. Haze stood just out of reach of his hands, squinting at him as if he were trying to see the empty eye sockets under the green glasses.

"It ain't me, it's him," Enoch said. "He's been running after yawl ever since back yonder by them potato peelers. He bought one of em."

"I knew somebody was following me!" the blind man said. "I felt it all the way from back yonder."



"I ain't followed you," Haze said. He felt the peeler box in his hand and looked at the girl. The black knitted cap came down almost to her eyes. She looked as if she might be thirteen or fourteen years old. "I ain't followed you nowhere," he said sourly. "I followed her." He stuck the peeler box out at her.

She jumped back and looked as if she were going to swallow her face. "I don't want that thing," she said. "What you think I want with that thing? Take it. It ain't mine. I don't want it!"

"I take it with thanks for her," the blind man said. "Put it in your sack," he said to her.

Haze thrust the peeler at her again, but he was still looking at the blind man.

"I won't have it," she muttered.

"Take it like I told you," the blind man said shortly.

After a second she took it and shoved it in the sack where the tracts were. "It ain't mine," she said. "I don't want none of it. I got it but it ain't mine."

"She thanks you for it," the blind man said. "I knew somebody was following me."

"I ain't followed you nowhere," Haze said. "I followed her to say I ain't beholden for none of her fast eye like she gave me back yonder." He didn't look at her, he looked at the blind man.

"What you mean?" she shouted. "I never gave you no fast eye. I only watch you tearing up that tract. He tore it up in little pieces," she said, pushing the blind man's shoulder. "He tore it up and sprinkled it over the ground like salt and wiped his hands on his pants."

"He followed me," the blind man said. "Wouldn't anybody follow you. I can hear the urge for Jesus in his voice."

"Jesus," Haze muttered, "my Jesus." He sat down by the girl's leg. His head was at her knee and he set his hand on the step next to her foot. She had on men's shoes and black cotton stockings. The shoes were laced up tight and tied in precise bows. She moved herself away roughly and sat down behind the blind man.

"Listen at his cursing," she said in a low tone. "He never followed you."

"Listen," the blind man said, "you can't run away from Jesus. Jesus is a fact. If who you're looking for is Jesus, the sound of it will be in your voice."

"I don't hear nothing in his voice," Enoch Emery said. "I know a whole heap about Jesus because I attended thisyer Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy that a woman sent me to. If it was anything about Jesus in his voice I could certainly hear it." He had got up onto the lion's back and he was sitting there sideways cross-legged.

The blind man reached out again and his hands suddenly covered Haze's face. For a second Haze didn't move or make any sound. Then he knocked the hands off. "Quit it," he said in a faint voice. "You don't know nothing about me."

"You got a secret need," the blind man said. "Them that know Jesus once can't escape Him in the end."

"I ain't never known Him," Haze said.

"You got a least knowledge," the blind man said. "That's enough. You know His name and you're marked. If Jesus has marked you there ain't nothing you can do about it. Them that have knowledge can't swap it for ignorance." He was leaning forward but in the wrong direction so that he appeared to be talking to the step below Haze's foot. Haze sat leaning backward with the black hat tilted forward over his face.

"My daddy looks just like Jesus," Enoch said from the lion's back. "His hair hangs to his shoulders. Only difference is he's got a scar acrost his chin. I ain't never seen who my mother is."

"You're marked with knowlege," the blind man said. "You know what sin is and only them that know what it is can commit it. I knew all the time we were walking here somebody was following me," he said. "You couldn't have followed her. Wouldn't anybody follow her. I could feel there was somebody near with an urge for Jesus."

"There ain't nothing for your pain but Jesus," the girl said suddenly. She leaned forward and stuck her arm out with her finger pointed at Haze's shoulder, but he spat down the steps and didn't look at her. "Listen," she said in a louder voice, "this here man and woman killed this little baby. It was her own child but it was ugly and she never give it any love. This child had Jesus and this woman didn't have nothing but good looks and a man she was living in Sin with. She sent the child away and it come back and she sent it away again and it come back again and ever time she sent it away, it come back to where her and this man was living in Sin. They strangled it with a silk stocking and hung it up in the chimney. It didn't give her

any peace after that, though. Everything she looked at was that child. Jesus made it beautiful to haunt her. She couldn't lie with that man without she saw it, staring through the chimney at her, shining through the brick in the middle of the night." She moved her feet around so that just the tips of them stuck out from her skirt which she had pulled tight around her legs. "She didn't have nothing but good looks," she said in the loud fast voice. "That ain't enough. No sirree."

"My Jesus," Haze said.

"It ain't enough," she repeated.

"I hear them scraping their feet inside there," the blind man said. "Get out the tracts, they're fixing to come out."

"What we gonna do?" Enoch asked. "What's inside theter building?"

"A program letting out," the blind man said. The child took the tracts out the gunny sack and gave him two bunches of them, tied with a string. "You and Enoch Emery go over on that side and give out," he said to her. "Me and this boy'll stay over here."

"He don't have no business touching them," she said. "He don't want to do nothing but shred them up."

"Go like I told you," the blind man said.

She stood there a second, scowling. Then she said, "You come on if you're coming," to Enoch Emery and Enoch jumped off the lion and followed her over to the other side.

The blind man was reaching forward. Haze ducked to the side but the blind man was next to him on the step with his hand clamped around his arm. He leaned forward so that he was facing Haze's knee and he said in a fast whisper, "You followed me here because you're in Sin but you can be a testament to the Lord. Repent! Go to the head of the stairs and renounce your sins and distribute these tracts to the people," and he thrust the stack of pamphlets into Haze's hand.

Haze jerked his arm away but he only pulled the blind man nearer. "Listen," he said, "I'm as clean as you are."

"Fornication," the blind man said.

"That ain't nothing but a word," Haze said. "If I was in Sin I was in it before I ever committed any. Ain't no change come in me." He was trying to pry the fingers off from around his arm but the blind

man kept wrapping them tighter. "I don't believe in Sin," he said. "Take your hand off me."

"You do," the blind man said, "you're marked."

"I ain't marked," Haze said, "I'm free."

"You're marked free," the blind man said. "Jesus loves you and you can't escape his mark. Go to the head of the stairs and. . . ."

Haze jerked his arm free and jumped up. "I'll take them up there and throw them over into the bushes," he said. "You be looking! See can you see?"

"I can see more than you!" the blind man shouted. "You got eyes and see not, ears and hear not, but Jesus'll make you see!"

"You be watching if you can see!" Haze said, and started running up the steps. People were already coming out the auditorium doors and some were half way down the steps. He pushed through them with his elbows out like sharp wings and when he got to the top, a new surge of them pushed him back almost to where he had started up. He fought through them again until somebody hollered, "Make room for this idiot!" and people got out of his way. He rushed to the top and pushed his way over to the side and stood there, glaring and panting.

"I never followed him," he said aloud. "I wouldn't follow a blind fool like that. My Jesus." He stood against the building, holding the stack of leaflets by the string. A fat man stopped near him to light a cigar, and Haze pushed his shoulder. "Look down yonder," he said. "See that blind man down there, he's giving out tracts. Jesus. You ought to see him and he's got this here ugly child dressed up in woman's clothes, giving them out too. My Jesus."

"There's always fanatics," the fat man said, moving on.

"My Jesus," Haze said. He leaned forward near an old woman with orange hair and a collar of red wooden beads. "You better get on the other side, lady," he said. "There's a fool down there giving out tracts." The crowd behind the old woman pushed her on, but she looked at him for an instant with two bright flea eyes. He started toward her through the people but she was already too far away, and he pushed back to where he had been standing against the wall. "Sweet Jesus Christ crucified," he said, and felt something turn in his chest. The crowd was moving fast. It was like a big spread ravelling and the separate threads disappeared down the dark streets until

there was nothing left of it and he was standing on the porch of the auditorium by himself. The tracts were speckled all over the steps and on the sidewalk and out into the street. The blind man was standing down on the first step, bent over, feeling for the crumpled pamphlets scattered around him. Enoch Emery was over on the other side, standing on the lion's head and trying to balance himself, and the child was picking up the pamphlets that were not too crushed to use again and putting them back in the gunny sack.

I don't need no Jesus, Haze said. I don't need no Jesus. I got Leora Watts.

He ran down the steps to where the blind man was, and stopped. He stood there a second just out of reach of his hands which had begun to grope forward, hunting the sound of his step, and then he started across the street. He was on the other side before the voice pierced after him. He turned and saw the blind man standing in the middle of the street, shouting, "Shrike! Shrike! My name is Asa Shrike when you want me!" A car had to swerve to the side to keep from hitting him.

Haze drew his head down nearer his hunched shoulders and went on quickly. He didn't look back until he heard the footsteps coming behind him.

"Now that we got shut of them," Enoch Emery panted, "whyn't we go somewher and have us some fun?"

"Listen," Haze said roughly, "I got business of my own. I seen all of you I want." He began walking very fast.

Enoch kept skipping steps to keep up. "I been here two months," he said, "and I don't know nobody. People ain't friendly here. I got me a room and there ain't never nobody in it but me. My daddy said I had to come. I wouldn't never have come but he made me. I think I seen you sommers before. You ain't from Stockwell, are you?"

"No."

"Melsy?"

"No."

"Sawmill set up there oncet," Enoch said. "Look like you had a kind of familer face."

They walked on without saying anything until they got on the main street again. It was almost deserted. "Goodby," Haze said and quickened his walk again.

"I'm going thisaway too," Enoch said in a sullen voice. On the left there was a movie house where the electric bill was being changed. "We hadn't got tied up with them hicks, we could have gone to a show," he muttered. He strode along at Haze's elbow, talking in a half mumble, half whine. Once he caught at his sleeve to slow him down and Haze jerked it away. "He made me come," he said in a cracked voice. Haze looked at him and saw he was crying, his face seamed and wet and a purple-pink color. "I ain't but eighteen year," he cried, "and he made me come and I don't know nobody, nobody here'll have nothing to do with nobody else. They ain't friendly. He done gone off with a woman and made me come but she ain't gonna stay for long, he's gonna beat hell out of her before she gets herself stuck to a chair. You the first familer face I seen in two months, I seen you sommers before. I know I seen you sommers before."

Haze looked straight ahead with his face set hard, and Enoch kept up the half mumble, half blubber. They passed a church and a hotel and an antique shop and turned up a street full of brick houses, each alike in the darkness.

"If you want you a woman you don't have to be follerin nothing looked like her," Enoch said. "I heard about where there's a house full of two-dollar ones. Whyn't we go have us some fun? I could pay you back next week."

"Look," Haze said, "I'm going where I stay—two doors from here. I got a woman. I got a woman, you understand? I don't need to go with you."

"I could pay you back next week," Enoch said. "I work at the city zoo. I guard a gate and I get paid ever week."

"Get away from me," Haze said.

"People ain't friendly here. You ain't from here but you ain't friendly neither."

Haze didn't answer him. He went on with his neck drawn close to his shoulder blades as if he were cold.

"You don't know nobody neither," Enoch said. "You ain't got no woman or nothing to do. I knew when I first seen you you didn't have nobody or nothing. I seen you and I knew it."

"This is where I live," Haze said, and he turned up the walk of the house without looking back at Enoch.

Enoch stopped. "Yeah," he cried, "oh yeah," and he ran his sleeve under his nose to stop the snivel. "Yeah," he cried. "Go on where you goin but looker here." He slapped at his pocket and ran up and caught Haze's sleeve and rattled the peeler box at him. "She give me this. She give it to me and there ain't nothing you can do about it. She invited me to come to see them and not you and it was you follerin them." His eyes glinted through his tears and his face stretched in an evil crooked grin.

Haze's mouth jerked but he didn't say anything. He stood there for an instant, small in the middle of the steps, and then he raised his arm and hurled the stack of tracts he had been carrying. It hit Enoch in the chest and knocked his mouth open. He stood looking, with his mouth hanging open, at where it had hit his front, and then he turned and tore off down the street; and Haze went into the house.

The night before was the first time he had slept with Leora Watts or any woman, and he had not been very successful with her. When he finished, he was like something washed ashore on her, and she had made obscene comments about him, which he remembered gradually during the day. He was uneasy in the thought of going to her again. He didn't know what she would say when she opened the door and saw him there.

When she opened the door and saw him there, she said, "Ha ha." She was a big blonde woman with a green nightgown on. "What do YOU want?" she said.

He put his face into what he thought was an all-knowing expression but it was only stretched a little on one side. The black wool hat sat on his head squarely. Leora left the door open and went back to the bed. He came in with his hat on and when it knocked the sacked electric lightbulb, he took it off. Leora rested her face on her hand and watched him. He began to move around the room, examining this and that. His throat got dryer and his heart began to grip him like a little ape clutching the bars of its cage. He sat down on the edge of her bed, with his hat in his hand.

Leora's eyes had narrowed some and her mouth had widened and got thin as a knife blade. "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, watching him. Haze stared blank-faced for a minute, then he

made three quick noises that were laughs. He jumped for the electric light cord and undressed in the dark.

Once when he was small, his father took him and his sister, Ruby, to a carnival that stopped in Melsy. There was one tent that cost more money, a little off to the side. A dried-up man with a horn voice was barking it. He never said what was inside. He said it was so SINSational that it would cost any man wanted to see it thirty-five cents, and it was so EXclusive, only fifteen could get in at a time. His father sent him and Ruby to a tent where two monkeys danced, and then he made for it, moving shuttle-faced and close to the walls of things, like he moved. Haze left the monkeys and followed him, but he didn't have thirty-five cents. He asked the barker what was inside.

"Beat it," the man said, "there ain't no pop and there ain't no monkeys."

"I already seen them," he said.

"That's fine," the man said, "beat it."

"I got fifteen cents," he said. "Whyn't you lemme in and I could see half of it." It's something about a privy, he was thinking. It's some men in a privy. Then he thought, maybe it's a man and a woman in a privy. She wouldn't want me in there. "I got fifteen cents," he said.

"It's more than half over," the man said, fanning with his straw hat. "You run along."

"That'll be fifteen cents worth then," Haze said.

"Scram," the man said.

"Is it a nigger?" Haze asked. "Are they doing something to a nigger?"

The man leaned off his platform and his dried-up face drew into a glare. "Where'd you get that idear?" he said.

"I don't know," Haze said.

"How old are you?" the man asked.

"Twelve," Haze said. He was ten.

"Gimme that fifteen cents," the man said, "and get in there."

He slid the money on the platform and scrambled to get in before it was over. He went through the flap of the tent and inside there was another tent and he went through that. His face was hot through to the back of his head. All he could see were the backs of the men. He climbed up on a bench and looked over their heads. They were looking down into a lowered place where something white was lying,



squirming a little, in a box lined with black cloth. For a second he thought it was a skinned animal and then he saw it was a woman. She was fat and she had a face like an ordinary woman except there was a mole on the corner of her lip, that moved when she grinned, and one on her side, that was moving too. Haze's head became so heavy he couldn't turn it away from her.

"Had one of themther built in ever casket," his father, up toward the front, said, "be a heap ready to go sooner."

He recognized the voice without looking. He fell down off the bench and scrambled out the tent. He crawled out under the side of the outside one because he didn't want to pass the barker. He got in the back of a truck and sat down in the far corner of it. The carnival was making a tin roar outside.

His mother was standing by the washpot in the yard, looking at him, when he got home. She wore black all the time and her dresses were longer than other women's. She was standing there straight, looking at him. He slid behind a tree and got out of her view, but in a few minutes, he could feel her watching him through the tree. He saw the lowered place and the casket again and a thin woman in the casket who was too long for it. Her head stuck up at one end and her knees were raised to make her fit. She had a cross-shaped face and hair pulled close to her head, and she was twisting and trying to cover herself while the men looked down. He stood flat against the tree, dry-throated. She left the washpot and come toward him with a stick. She said, "What you seen?"

"What you seen?" she said.

"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. In a minute she threw the stick away from her and went back to the washpot, shut-mouthed.

The next day he took his shoes in secret out into the woods. He never wore them except for revivals and in winter. He took them out the box and filled the bottoms of them with stones and small rocks and then he put them on. He laced them up tight and walked in them

through the woods what he knew to be a mile, until he came to a creek, and then he sat down and took them off and eased his feet in the wet sand. He thought, that ought to satisfy Him. Nothing happened. If a stone had fallen he would have taken it for a sign. After a while he drew his feet out the sand and let them dry, and then he put the shoes on again with the rocks still in them and he walked a half mile back before he took them off.