

Simply dumbstruck by her beauty Booker stared open-mouthed at a young blue-black woman standing at the curb laughing. Her clothes were white, her hair like a million black butterflies asleep on her head. She was talking to another woman — chalk white with blond dreadlocks. A limousine negotiated the curb and both waited for the driver to open the door for them. Although it made him sad to see the limo pull away, Booker smiled and smiled as he walked on to the train entrance, where he played with the two guitarists. Neither one was there, not Michael or Chase, and it was only then that he noticed the rain — soft, steady. The sun still blazed so the raindrops falling from a baby-blue sky were like crystal breaking into specks of light on the pavement. He decided to play his trumpet alone in the rain anyway, knowing that no pedestrians would stop to listen; rather, they closed umbrellas as they rushed down the stairs to the trains. Still in thrall to the sheer beauty of the girl he had seen, he put the trumpet to his lips. What emerged was music he had never played before. Low, muted notes held long, too long, as the strains floated through drops of rain.

Booker had no words to describe his feelings. What he did know was that the rain-soaked air smelled like lilac when he played while remembering her. Streets with litter at their curbs appeared interesting, not filthy; bodegas, beauty shops, diners, thrift stores leaning against one another looked homey, downright friendly. Each time he imagined her eyes glittering toward him or her lips open in an inviting, reckless smile, he felt not just a swell of desire but also the disintegration of the haunt and gloom in which for years Adam's death had clouded him. When he stepped through that cloud and became as emotionally content as he had been before Adam skated into the sunset — there she was. A midnight Galatea always and already alive.[...]

Her self-love was consistent with her cosmetic company milieu and mirrored his obsession with her. So if she rattled on about coworkers, products and markets, he watched her mesmerizing eyes that were so deeply expressive they said much more than mere language could. Speaking-eyes, he thought, accompanied by the music of her voice. Every feature — the ledge of her cheekbones, her invitational mouth, her nose, forehead, chin as well as those eyes — was more exquisite, more aesthetically pleasing because of her obsidian-midnight skin. Whether he was lying under her body, hovering above it or holding her in his arms, her blackness thrilled him. Then he was certain that he not only held the night, he owned it, and if the night he held in his arms was not enough, he could always see starlight in her eyes. [...]

When Bride was at her office, Booker relished the solitude for trumpet practice, scribbling notes to mail to his favorite aunt, Queen, and since there were no books in Bride's apartment — just fashion and gossip magazines — he visited the library often to read or reread books he had ignored or misunderstood while at university. *The Name of the Rose*, for one, and *Remembering Slavery*, a collection that so moved him he composed some mediocre, sentimental music to commemorate the narratives. He read Twain, enjoying the cruelty of his humor. He read Walter Benjamin, impressed by the beauty of the translation, he read Frederick Douglass's autobiography again, relishing for the first time the eloquence that both hid and displayed his hatred. He read Herman Melville, and let Pip break his heart, reminding him of Adam alone, abandoned, swallowed by waves of casual evil.