

For Kellis, Now

IT WAS LONELY when the music went,
Our thin shared wall no longer resonant.
I saw so much sorrow in young eyes
For loss of love they never knew they had.

"It was the boys in Woolworth's,"
My father, dying, told me,
"They changed everything."
"That was Kellis."
"Well, thank him for me," my dying father said.
I hadn't heart to tell him you were gone.

So I made do.
Thurman Green, Teagarden,
Miles, always Miles.
I tried by labor to earn trust
Your smile effortlessly won.
I thought eventually we'd be okay.

But now their sick, bad light rolls down the hills
Like crosses burning.
I'm sure you see it from your mountaintop.
Defenceless under the night,
The morning of our dread has come.
You must be risen with us.

Strike up your march, o dear my brother, where you are,
Play us, somber yet as though dancing, into the street.
Wake Father Abraham from where he slumbers.
My teacher Thurgood—get him up.
He marches slowly now, his great frame lumbering,
But there is still a mountain of thunder in that man.
Fannie Lou and Rosa—bring them.
Toni will bring Pecola, wide-eyed and wondering.
Addie Mae, Cynthia, the Carols:
Teach them to dance again at dawn.

I shall not live out the day.
So what? Now you are here.

It's my turn now to go down into the dark,
And you will stay to make,
As you always did, the band.
In sorrow to the cemetery,
Then home in joyful harmony
You'll lead our march across the burning sand
To Jordan's very edge and fly across.
My heart beats only to keep time for you.
Hand in hand once again at last
Together we go to face their dogs.

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