Part I

The Black Moochie

A Novella by Eldridge Cleaver

While incarcerated in State Prison in 1966, Eldridge Cleaver wrote the following notes for an autobiography, novel or whatever, on his experiences while growing up in Los Angeles. On my recent visit with him in Algeria, I was shown the manuscript and felt that it should be published. It provides an insight into an important part of Cleaver's early life and further evidence of his immense power as a writer. The names have been changed for legal reasons. Part II will appear in the November issue.

Upon returning from Algeria, I was promptly subpoenaed to appear before the Federal Grand Jury meeting in San Francisco, and ordered to turn over all records of activities performed on behalf of Eldridge Cleaver's legal defense. The State and Justice Departments have evoked a series of regulations making contact with Cleaver illegal; this subpoena is part of the general pattern of harassment. We regard these regulations as unconstitutional and intend to challenge them.

Cleaver has agreed to be the International Editor of this magazine and reports by him will appear regularly.—ROBERT SCHEER

THEY CALLED ME "THE BLACK MOOCHIE," because I ran with the Mexicans. It started early; the word "Mexican" burned into my brain in Arkansas, where there were none. Mother told me that we would see Mexicans in Arizona. All the way on the train I kept asking her to show me a Mexican. I expected to see something beyond human, something beyond imagination. I don't remember the first Mexican I saw. It may have been a whole crowd of them. What I remember is pressing my face to the plate glass window of the Tortilletta in Phoenix, trying to see the Mexicans inside mixing masa with their feet, as it was said they did. I don't remember seeing them do that, but I remember being outraged at the idea of them doing it. It was unbelievable that people could put their dirty feet in food and still eat it. Worse, sell it to others to eat. Worse yet, others buying it knowing it was mixed by foot. My image of feet was of stinky feet, like my brother James' feet. James had real funky feet. What if a Mexican had feet like James and stuck them in the masa? It would be a violation of the Pure Food and Drug Act, for sure. Then we moved to Los Angeles, to Rose Hill, and I went to school with Mexicans. These were the first human Mexicans I knew. In Rose Hill, they detached themselves from shadows in my mind and became for real. Chicanos.

Arnaldo Martinez, Roberto Areaga, Nanny Goat and me, we were natural buddies—perhaps because we were of the same pitch of insanity. We called Arnaldo "Junior," and Roberto we called "Jap," "Honorable Jap," and I don't even know Nanny's real name. They called me "Sapo." Negroes called me the "black moochie," with overtones of derision, because I put them down and ran with the Mexicans. Why did I dig the Mexicans more? I liked the way they did things. And then my family chose to move to Rose Hill instead of Watts or the East Side where all the Negroes lived, because there were some very phony Negro families in Rose Hill. The ones with boys my age had long since turned them into sissies by keeping them under the family thumb—like Charlie and Floyd Grant. Floyd was exactly my age, but he had no backbone. If his father told him to come home early and we wanted to stay out late, Floyd went home to his father and spoiled everything. Charlie was even more sissified than Floyd. The only other Negroes my age were Bobby Hooper and Donald, who was just a little younger. We ran together for a while, until the first time we went to Juvenile Hall. When we got out, Bobby became almost a saint. That left only the Mexicans. They were like me—wild, crazy, didn't give a damn. We were happy together.

I envied the way Junior's shoes would shine. Mine never would shine like that. I'd rub mine all night long, but they just wouldn't shine like Junior's. Junior used to come to school with his shiny shoes on and I'd get mad. Everybody dug the way his shoes held a shine. Junior would play the part, as if he didn't know what it was all about. But he knew, and he would stick his shoes out for everyone to see. Once I stepped on his shine on purpose, on the sly.

"Meet me after school, *mayate*," Junior said.

After school, everybody was there. Junior was over-matched, but what he taught me that day was that even though he was a little cat compared to me and even though he knew in advance that he would get whipped, there was a pride in fighting back when someone tried to bully you. We drew each other's blood, but in the years to come we never fought again and were the best of friends.

Mrs. Brick was my teacher and she looked like Betty Grable. All the cats were in love with her. We'd rub up against her and try to peep under her dress. We'd dream about her at night. She had a fine ass and big tits. She dressed sexy. I used to get a hard-on just looking at her. She knew that we wanted to fuck her, to suck her tits. One day when we were returning from the music room, Mrs. Brick marched the whole class up the stairs. I liked Michele Ortaga then. She was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. Her skin was white as milk and she had long black hair. She was very delicate, very feminine—even at that titless, shapeless age. What I liked about her was that whenever I looked at her she would blush, turn red from her neck up. Her ears would glow. I was the only boy who could make her change colors. While we were waiting at the top of the stairs that day, I found myself opposite Michele. I had been conscious of her beauty all afternoon. During music period I'd been staring at her, making her blush, and while we stood at the top of the stairs I was staring at her. I said to her: "I love you, Michele."

Her neck caught fire, the red flames lit up her ears. "I hate you!" Michele hissed at me. We traded words back and forth.

For some forgotten reason, I wound up saying: "Your mother is fat as an elephant." Michele, hurt and embarrassed, burst out in tears. Mrs. Brick came to see what was happening. Michele told her I had called her mother an elephant. Mrs. Brick turned on me with flame in her eyes, and I could see a hatred that frightened me. "You black nigger!" she snarled, and slapped my face. It sounded like a shot going off in my ear—the words, I mean—I don't think I even felt the blow. Her words brought tears to my eyes.

From that day on, Mrs. Brick still looked like Betty Grable. She still had a fine ass and nice tits, she still dressed real sexy, and she still kept me with a hard-on. But my feeling for her was no longer the warm desire of the lover. What I felt for her was the lust/hatred of the rapist. I felt about the same for Michele. I could still make her blush, but between us there was a deep abyss into which something of us that was bathed in sunlight had fallen forever.

Years after graduating from the grammar school, me and Jap and Junior were pushing Junior's car down North Huntington Drive, trying to kick the motor over. Behind us a woman stopped her car to give us a shove. I waved to the driver to guide her car's bumper into Junior's. Just as I ran to jump into Junior's car, I saw that the driver of the other car was Mrs. Brick. We recognized each other, smiled and waved. Junior, Jap and me had all been in her class together. "That's Mrs. Brick!" I shouted as I jumped into Junior's car. She honked her horn and waved and smiled as she passed us by and disappeared in front of us.

I remember Mrs. Brick. I remember Michele. Do they remember me? Did we scar each other mutually? Can a girl you made both blush and cry not remember you in some deep rhythm of her soul?

This land of blood. This soil groans under the weight of how we cut each other to bits. The blood I have let. The blood I have bled. The pain I have given. The pain I have felt. Michele Ortaga, girl of black hair and white skin, girl with the flaming neck, I will carry your image into eternity—graven into my soul, burnt forever into my skull, a part of my life, real, significant, a memory of flesh and blood. This small thing—that we chanced to attend the same school on this civilized planet hurtling through space, that because we were of the same age we were in the same class, that because we were in the same class I discovered the flutter of your heart. I knew how to make you feel anticipations of your budding womanhood by my way of looking budding manhood into your eyes. Whatever hatred of you I carried for years after that day on the stairs, I no longer have. I have for you now only the pure love of the memory of your flaming neck, your bright eyes, your smile at me, Michele.

Eagle rock. highland park. Arroyo Seco Park. Freeway. The Los Angeles River. The Dam. The hills. The Midget Auto Races. Fishing. Hiking. Model airplanes. The cops always somewhere, hovering, a vague presence, reeking the stink of a bad dream. The Sun. The dry dirt, parched expanses. Birds—doves, killdees, sparrows, hawks, pigeons, quail, robins. Snakes. Tarantulas. Gopher holes. Spiders. Rabbits.

The long twisting distances. The good feeling at the top of a steep hill after the long climb up. The serenity of aloneness. A girl named Fay and I on the hill at the tank. Fay sitting on the wall. Fay took everything tender between us to the grave with her: beyond my power to pull her back from the clutch of death—death so cruel as to silence her laughter, still the beating of her passionate heart, make cold those hot lips of hers. She had such pleasure to give; she enjoyed life so. My heart pounding. How to protect Fay. Me standing on the edge of the cliff to frighten Fay. Going out farther on the lip of the cliff to make her ache for me. Fay in love with Cutie. My pain.

How I pursued her and won her love too late. Yes, I stalked her love as if it were a wild animal; I trapped it with an unobtrusive love. I was always there when she needed someone to fill the hours of her loneliness, to drive her around Los Angeles, to lend her money when her allotment check was late. I offered her companionship, protection, a helping hand that did not try to grasp her, though I ached to embrace her. This has to be rendered very delicately, very indirectly, because Fay was very delicate, very indirect, exquisite in the beauty of her existence. The earth flattered itself by decorating its face with Fay. Jail. Her death. The telegram: Fay passed away Tuesday morning at three a.m. Burial will be in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Signed Mother. The Valentine's Day Card. Rickey. Her husband. Our hike. Selling dope. The Rain. The narks wise to weather. Fay at my mother's. Her hair, her sweet scent, her body. The Wyamine tubes. Near wreck. Took her to the General Hospital. The fear, madness. The circles the brain goes round in. Burt's Store, the Project. Fay waving at Frank, Cutie, Oldie and me, as we rounded the bend in Frank's Chevy; she was sitting there on the stone stairs, reading a magazine, her legs held close together prettily, sexily.

Lulu Jean and Cassie side by side in the grass. I'm fucking first one, then the other. Lulu Jean has a thick patch of red hair. Cassie is bald and too small to enter, but in her mind she is big as a gate and she won't leave me alone long enough to enjoy Lulu Jean. Hot Lulu Jean, tight and moist and working toward you in search of a mutual moment of pleasure. But Cassie keeps threatening to "go tell" if I don't "do" her. We'd gone into the hills to pick wild mustard greens.

The most beautiful green grass of my life was in Arroyo Seco Park. It was like many green football fields placed side by side and end to end. The water sprinklers were always working. Somewhere someone was always mowing the lawn. We felt like aliens, expecting someone to run us away. We had no idea that we had a perfect right to use this city property, to be in the park, to stay as long as we liked. We had no sense of "a right" to use the park, or anything else—not even a right to life.

We'd stay mostly in the park, with our slingshots, trying to shoot birds. We were really good shots, as deadly accurate as rifles. We never got a killdee—not in years of trying. We'd thought them specially protected by God in person. We'd shoot straight at them and miss. Perfect shots, but never a dead killdee. Any other bird within range was in a heap of trouble. Our slingshot culture: a time existed when I couldn't hit the side of a barn with a marble; the time came when I could put out a match, hit the headlight of a moving car, knock a morning dove off the telephone wire or out of a tree, brain a rabbit if it paused in its run to gauge its enemy. Our lives were given to finding car inner tubes that were of the right rubber. We favored red tubes, best for the stretch and snap-back. By

stretching the rubber we knew if we had good stuff. We'd look for little cracks in the rubber when it was stretched to full tension. We'd haunt gas stations for old tubes of quality. We read the deterioration of the modern world through the decrease in the quality of the car inner tubes. Seeking tubes in El Sarreno, Alhambra, Pasadena. We went all the way to El Monte on foot once, but never again. Exploring the world. The madness of our foot treks! We might show up anywhere, we didn't care. It told of the quality of our lives, our needs.

Bobby Hooper was a dead-eye shot, could hit anything; Charlie and Floyd were good; Donald was good. The Mexicans were all good, and dreadful. They'd pass by at a distance with their vicious dogs. Sometimes we'd have our little wars, exchange vollies. I was deadly—the most accurate, the most daring shot. The others would be trying to creep up on a pair of doves: flap! I'd down a dove from way back. Incredible shot! Uncanny shot! Skill mixed with luck, that's all it was. The others thought maybe I had some dark secrets. I encouraged this superstition, but in truth I'd just take careful aim and let go (that was for long shots). Sometimes I'd hit; mostly I'd miss. But when we were within range, we were all deadly.

Hide-and-go-seek. Kick the can. Count to a hundred; count back down from a hundred to give everyone time to hide, then seek them out. Find them and beat them back to home to call them out. This was the moment of our heat—fondling the amazing bodies of girls in the seclusion of dark bushes, feeling their little hairs, their budding breasts, the warmth of their flesh, all caught up in the fever of our growth. Wild, implacable nights without care.

We moved in droves, sweeping over the earth like a plague of locusts, from Rose Hill of sweet youth to Ramona Gardens, past Lincoln Park, the next nearest cluster of niggers. To their dances on Thursday nights. Money for wine was a must. Two fifths of Santa Fe to guzzle down as we walked the tracks of the Sierra Vista Local. Irene and Laura, Claudine and Elizabeth, Anne Bee—those hot-bodied black girls of our age, niggresses whose bodies we'd rub in the slow drag of the scrunch across the dance floor. Our knives open at the ready in our pockets in case the Mexicans wanted to get in, or in case the niggers wanted to get us, as they sometimes did, because of the girls. The sound of the Blues thick in the dim room. Funk of our sweat mixed with wine-breath, cigarette smoke, stale air, cheap perfume and hot snatch.

Filbert Duerte. Me and Filbert hit it off. (What is this nostalgia reaching back into the dustbins of memory, dredging up old forgotten friendships with white people? Dusting them off and examining them?) They are all gone anyway, fled into the anonymity of the megalopolis, some of them like Houseman's lads and lassies, their mouths stopped with dust. Irma, I remember, and Katherine Bowlinda, and that little red-headed, green-eyed broad who used to talk with me all during Mr. Avakian's class. Virginia and her goofy brother Richard, who lived on Mercury Avenue but remained aloof from Rose Hill, from the world of the Project and from the hills. But they are my life. Rex Wilkinson and Lloyd Collins spitting in each other's faces, laughing like idiots each time. And Mark, making his weird sounds like a barking dog. My mind drifts back through the years to the halls of the school once again. Mrs. Ritchard. Mrs. Collins. Lulu Bell, tall and high-yellow, sitting across the room from me in Mrs. Ritchard's room on the second floor, lascivious beyond her years with big tits and full ass, a woman's body in grammar school. Out each afternoon to sports. Exercise. Kickball. Baseball. Dodgeball. My forte.

Mrs. Dwyer was my first teacher at Huntington Drive Street School. The class was in the garden my first day. I was shown the way to her. I remember her smiling, with greying hair, her dress blowing in the breeze—she remains essentially a blur. Veils of blue silk hang from her and flutter gently in the wind. There were days in the garden when she'd squat down to show someone how to turn the soil with a hand spade. We'd seize this chance to look under her dress at her dark parts, always hidden. Those strange parts of her, the contemplation of which caused a fever in one's blood. Mrs. Collins was mean. "Woe be unto you!" was her constant refrain. Lloyd's mother. High-yellow. Mean nigger bitch. Loved to slap you silly. Mrs. Readerman was beyond beautiful—she was unbelievable. How I used to wish that I was back in kindergarten again, back in Mrs. Readerman's room.

1946 or '47: the tunnel leading from the school gate under the Sierra Vista Local, the Pasadena Special, the Alhambra Line. This tunnel led to South Huntington Drive, from North to South. There was another one doing the same thing at the other end of the school yard. Each morning all classes lined up at eight a.m. sharp to pledge allegiance to the flag as it was run up the pole. "I hedge all-allegiance to the rag of the Disunited States of America and to the republic for which it falls, many nations, divisible, with liberty and justice for some." This was how we used to say it.

Saturdays and Sundays: heaven was to take the street car downtown to one of the grand theaters. American movies in the golden age of my youth. Once we saw Danny, one of the Marijuanos, downtown with Beatrice, whom he later married. Beatrice used to go to Wilson with my sister, Helen. Most everybody else in Rose Hill went to Lincoln. Danny gave Jap a dollar to carry a little brown bag back to Rose Hill and keep it for him. The bag was full of brown cigarettes. "*Marijuana!*" Jap said excitedly to us. This was fantastic. We all felt as though we shared a great secret. We all wanted to be there when Jap returned the stuff to Danny. This was a big moment in our lives.

To the Catholic Church every Thursday at two p.m. for catechism, a way to beat the schoolroom. Always a chance to sneak out of church, away from the nuns. Jacqueline Coles in the Christmas Pageant, singing in the choir. I could pick out her voice above all the others. She and I could have been in love. Her father probably talked against me, so that when I tried to hit on her she responded very maturely, as if what I proposed was kid stuff. Bitch. Married a professional football player. Had a baby. Got divorced. Became a cop.

Camp in the summer, up into the mountains. It may be that my first trip to jail was because I believed that I'd get a chance to go back to camp! That crazy show we put on at the Project. Me and Lloyd and Bobby doing The Cannibal King. The Movies. Federation Dances. The football we'd play on the vacant lots. Jimmy Jones was great. Broken field runner. Too short and not heavy enough to make varsity. Spark plug of the B team. Go, you Lincoln Tigers. Our team had spirit. Chauvinism. From Huntington Drive Street School, we would go on to Lincoln. Most of the patties went to Wilson in El Sarreno. We hated Wilson. They hardly ever beat us in anything. If they beat us in football, we'd just about die, hang our heads in shame. My soul was in Lincoln even when my body was still in Huntington Drive. I remember graduation day. A big deal.

Festivities out on the black top in the blazing sun. It seemed like the day would never end.

The Judeos on Boundary. The Judeos in the little store across from the school. Tight mothers, selling penny candies for two cents. These were the type of Jews that made you anti-semitic, but who knew whether or not they were really Jews? Except that they resembled my idea of what a Jew looked like. And they had accents. They were scurvy, weird. We'd only go to them when it was absolutely necessary. When we came into their store, they knew that we had no choice, so they did us in, openly hostile. There must be a billion grocery stores in America! Vegetables, bread, canned goods, bottles, meat in the display window, cookies, cokes, goodies in cellophane bags.

How wonderful it was when mother got paid and came home with her shopping bags full. Sometimes we were such savages that we would not even go meet her, to help her bring home food for us to eat! I think I distinguished myself in that I was always trying to be helpful to her. I used to go help her clean up those schoolrooms, but I was so slow that I slowed her down.

I remember all of these things, these people. They deserve to live. I must make them live. Huntington Drive Street School, the core of our relationship, brought us all together. I feel that I knew and loved people then as I have never done since. There was more mutual love all the way around, more respect for natural ability. When someone picked me for their dodgeball team, they knew that they were picking a winner. It used to gas me all the way down to my toes to have a girl pick me as her first choice. Those were the beautiful days of my youth. Those are the days to which I flee for refuge. Those are the days that now have the power to restore my spirits. The beauty of our lives then—we were all fresh and could have been saved. But the death of our hope was being formed there without our knowing what or where. There is a love between the members of a school class. You come up through the ranks together and diverge in your separate ways, drifting further and further apart. How many of us made this scene of mine, this prison scene? In my years of confinement, I've run across few, if any. Did I, then, bring this virus with me from Arkansas? Do I have a rare blood type?

John, Howard and George. Pretty George Johnson with the curly hair lived on the hill across the tracks. All those cats who used to seem so much sharper than me, so much hipper, turned into weird cats—duds. I mean this not disrespectfully but as an observation: those cats made weird trips in life. Howard, who used to beat up on me and John for smoking pot, later on came to me to buy his joints. We'd get a kick out of how he used to be so against weed. My life a tangent. I did a lot of looking, a lot of lusting, because of this cross-cultural thing. The Black Moochie. Incredible, me making all the scenes on the Chicano circuit. We didn't comb the black circuit, so I was actually absorbing the patterns of the Chicanos. The kick of cruising in the car interminably with emphasis on digging the chicks. But all cats do it. It's just that our circuit was East L.A. There was hardly ever a clash on the race thing, yet I was excluded. When we went to weddings we ate outside, ostensibly because we didn't want to go in, but really because of me. And my buddies, perhaps one at a time, would take a stroll inside. But I too used to stroll inside sometimes. I was from Rose Hill.

ROSE HILL CHINGA. The memorable parties. The Zenda Ball Room. Jam sessions at the Floral Drive-In Theater. The Angelus Ball Room. The Narbo Grill —the one right there on Olympic and Central. Hamms. Tubs. Armands. Madness! Tickler. Cutie. Frank. Me. Scheming on the broads. Wasn't it my fault that they didn't score more often? This is painful to admit, but it's the truth. I must have known this and blinded myself to it. Trapped. Energy turning inwards and not even knowing it, not knowing what was happening. We made those scenes. We were known on sight as regulars. Our ears were tuned to our circuit. Vamps from Rose Hill, the guys with the bag. This was our license for entry anywhere.

Gloria came to score one night with some cats. When she saw me at Lincoln, she knew what I was up to. The word was out on me. My sharp clothes told on me also. I was a fool seeking recognition. My '39 Chevy. 70 dollars. Got a ticket in it. Frank driving it with a broken leg. Again the narks declined to take us in. What was the meaning of such luck? We had been to the Apple Cider Mill on Mission Road. Bought a case of beer. Cops spotted us. Followed our car. Frank, his leg broken, tried to push me behind the wheel. Cops shook us down for dope but found none. Let us go.

We were so stupid we couldn't even find any whores to buy pussy. Walking around with hundreds of dollars in our pockets, walking down the red light district and couldn't even find a whore. What was happening? Frank wrecked my car. Flying up the street with the lights out, right into a parked car. Cat in the parked car must have been fucking the broad; they were down out of sight. Frank flicked on the headlights just a second before hitting the car. The light enabled us to see the cat and the broad when they jumped up because of the crash. Frank paid for the damage to the other cat's car, but my car just sat there until the cops came and towed it away. I kept expecting to hear from the police, but never a word. Weird, some of the changes I used to go through.

My youth, the foundation years of my life.
Rose Hill Chinga
Neighborhood of fantastic people
People of my life
People who own my heart
People of Rose Hill
You I remember and love.
Those of you who shared mutual
Hate with me
I forgive you
I beg you to forgive me
We need each other;
We are all that we have
You live on in my memory
I've carried you with me all these years
I've carried you in love
To understand your lives
Back when our neighborhood was a prize-winning hamlet
Back when we wore the name Rose Hill with pride
Part of Los Angeles but whole unto ourselves.
When Peter Chavez was killed in war we all mourned
We all came to see his casket

To make the wake with his family.
Peter was of us
Peter was Rose Hill
Rose Hill Chinga.
When that car plunged over the hill
Going round the bend behind Burt's store
And crashed down on Mercury Avenue
The crash belonged to all of us
It burned into our souls equally.
When Lupe's father was found dead
A part of Rose Hill was found dead
A part of Rose Hill talked about itself.
Rose Hill Chinga
With shanty pads squatting on mud hills
People of this earth trudging up muddy paths
To their houses
Slipping and sliding in the mud
Walking on the grass to keep from falling, to keep
one's footing
Sweet smells of the earth when the grass was green
No smog in Rose Hill
Far from the industrial heart of Los Angeles
A forgotten hamlet
A peaceful spot
Site of home
A jealous love of our sacred ground
We were bound to each other.
With what pride we owned the land
We knew Rose Hill as our own
We'd bow down on hands and knees to kiss our dirt
The birds in the sky were ours
The Housing Project was ours
The garbage collectors once each week were ours
The milk man making his rounds in the morning mist
of dew was ours
The mail man delivering the mail was ours
The Good Humor Ice Cream man with his musical
wagon was ours
The Helms Bakery Man with his musical wagon was ours
The bus that ran down Mercury Avenue was ours
The planes flying overhead were ours
The Catholic Church on Mercury Avenue was ours
The Protestant Church on Boundary Avenue was ours
The Negro Church on Junipero Street was ours
The corn the old men sowed in the hills was ours
The walnuts growing wild in the hills were ours
The peaches growing wild in the hills were ours
The apricot trees in our yards were ours
The fires that burned the dried grass each year were ours
The beauty of our women was ours
The strength of our men was ours
The squeals, laughter and tears of the children were ours
We had a sense of ourselves.
We said Rose Hill and we meant all things in it.

SAVAGE! MEAN MONGREL DOG of my nightmares, tiger-colored hound of no understanding. You had a friend in me, you idiot, but you preferred me as an enemy. Tore my pants one day. Chased me every chance you got, barking and showing your murderous teeth. Why did you allow John, Bobby and even square-headed Lloyd to come around? Why did you focus your attack on me? Did you sense some evil force in me that was absent in the others? Mary and Joan—the only bitches in the whole neighborhood who were putting out ass to us and you had to be their dog! You foul mutt of a fuck! Savage. You well deserved your name, chewing tin cans, rags and sticks of wood, car tires and old shoes. Did you resent the fact that I hung the name on you which stuck? Your name was Brownie, but you abused it with your scurvy sneak attacks, so I thought it was only fitting that you wear the name of your actions: Savage! Did you think you were a goat? You brought your death upon yourself. Your blood is not on my hands. I had no choice that night but to do you in, to sneak up on you as you so often had snuck up on others, and put a .22 slug in your crazy head. Did you see it coming, Savage, that night in the dark, from ambush, with your mad red eyes? You saw everything else. I anticipated that, true to your greed, as soon as you got wind of me, you'd come running, teeth bared, lips curled, head lowered. Splat! Boy, did you look surprised!

Fay, with Rickey on her lap, waited for me in the canary-yellow Dodge convertible with the black top. I entered the drugstore and copped five tubes of Wyamine. We downed a tube each and washed it down with black coffee at a Stan's Drive-In. Then we began our tour of the white man's wealthy city.

Lulu Jean and Maude danced naked for us. Mrs. Warren saw. One day from my yard I saw Mrs. Warren pee standing up like a man in her backyard.

Once I got Lulu Jean by a telephone pole at dusk. Caught her coming from the store with a loaf of bread. I had to hurry, she said, 'cause they were holding up dinner for the bread. I slipped it in her standing up. We both wiggled up on a good feeling.

Carolyn—felt her up in the swimming pool in El Sarreno. Little bitch thought she was hot shit. Did you think sticking my finger up your pussy was more dignified than my dick inside you would have been?

Polito's mother, sitting watching TV with her legs gaping open. She was my TV that night.

HENRY JOHNSON WAS LAUGHABLY STINGY. His wife. Dorothy, never said anything—only had babies. Tee Tee was a punk. Henry's children hustled bottles and took the money home to him. It was strictly business with him. We swiped a box of bananas from Fontana's Market. Anne turned a trick with Don Trinni one Sunday. Mother saw her come out and hide the money under a bush and told me and Benny. Me and Benny got the money and told mother there was nothing there, then took Anne up on the hill and did it to her. Then we took her to the show with her money, treated her to popcorn, candy and a soda pop.

The Vegetable Man. How he made a profit I don't know. We'd steal him blind. Here he comes with his truck. We'd run along behind and just take what we wanted. When he stopped for the housewives, we'd work one side while he was on the other. Watermelons, buckets of plums, apples, oranges, bunches of carrots—everything went. Once Mitch even picked his pocket with those bold fingers of his, just as there was a time when Mitch discovered a little hole in the counter at the hot dog stand at the Lincoln Park Speedway; through that hole we got dollars by the dozen. Then the Vegetable Man got a bus; instead of seats inside, he had racks of vegetables. Same

story. In through the front door and out the back, pockets full.

Mary Goat needs a volume to herself. The only thing white left in those hills. Old as the hills themselves. Old and gnarled, she walked bent over with a stick. Had a herd of dogs, flocks of pigeons, cats, goats, rabbits—all living in the house with her. She was rich. We bought our house from her. There she comes. Everybody get out of her way! She'd crack your skull with that stick! From a safe distance, we'd taunt her with, "Mary Goat!"

I entered the Thrifty Drug Store on Daly Avenue, off Broadway near Five Points, and bought five tubes of Wyamine. Behind the nun's apartment house, across the street from the Catholic Church, I parked the Dodge one night—backed it in quietly and took care of business in the back seat with Jo Ann. Picked up Thelma at the bus stop and dropped her at the dentist's. Almost every day I picked the girls up at Lincoln High and drove them home. Narcotic agents stopped me once, Chester and me, in the Dodge. We were wasted on bennies and pot. "You made that U-turn like you owned the street," one said. "Are you guys high? "No," I said. Although I didn't even have a driver's license, they told us to beat it, to be careful. We left in a hurry, amazed. I'd drive Nina to Enchandia Girls' School every morning; Irene to Lincoln. These were two of the choicest bitches ever created, and they guarded their Catholic cherries as though waiting for the Holy Ghost to rape them. Saving it, they said, for their husbands, some day. Crazy religious bitches, made my life miserable. I used to sit there trying to con them out of their box, rod hard as Chinese arithmetic, hard and throbbing, swollen big as a baseball bat between my legs. Agony. But they were unmoved. Amazing bitches. And I could tell that their pants were on fire too—only I was a fool, an idiot. I didn't know the game of peek-a-boo then, so I missed a lot of choice pussy. Sabu got Nina's cherry. Alley got Irene's.

We had a regular circuit, a territory we'd patrol. Frank had a natural genius for sniffing out choice broads whose parents kept them hidden away from the evils of the world—from horny cats like us. We'd drive down weird streets, spot the girls peeping out at us from behind huge bushes in their yards, through knot-holes in tall fences, behind curtains drawn over dark windows. We'd wink at them, smile, waving at them, gesturing at them to be bold and defiant, to come on out. We'd stick out our tongues to let them know that we saw them as something good to eat. Sometimes they'd come running out. Sometimes they'd give us the nasty finger. Sometimes they'd turn their heads in distaste, disgust, contempt—obedient to Catholic virtues. Sometimes they'd tell us to come back after dark, and sometimes we'd have to beat it in a hurry, pursued by irate fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles, cousins, etc.

All the way to Tijuana, for those hundreds of miles from L.A., I was preoccupied with the dream of fucking a big Mexican whore. The miles blew by like wind, a steady flow of air through the wind visor of Frank's Chevy. Me, Frank, Cutie, Oldie. We dropped bennies and blew joints all the way. We didn't even see San Diego when we shot through it, down interminable strips of highway. My rod stayed hard all the way. We'd say of ourselves that we were young, dumb and full of come, but only me and Oldie were young. Frank and Cutie were old and married, already made cynical by hatred of their wives. When we walked into the whorehouse, eight whores jumped up and rushed for me. My ego hit the ceiling. They argued over me in Spanish. I chose the one I thought offered the most convincing hints of erotic trips to come. She rushed me to a room. Three dollars for the room, seven for her. I thought her a cynical bitch. I couldn't understand why she wasn't madly in love with me by then, as hard as I was piling her. To shut her up, I gave her seven more dollars. Before I finally busted my nuts I had to shut her up two more times, seven dollars each time.

Frank and Oldie fucked. Cutie refused to touch a whore, stating weirdly that he didn't goof off like that on his wife. On the drive back, they laughed at me and said I was the biggest trick in the universe. I was bragging about how all the bitches rushed for me when we walked into the whorehouse. Frank laughed so hard he nearly wrecked the car, at 70 miles an hour. "You fucking fool!" he laughed. "Can't you see? Those whores know that you *mayates* are crazy for white skin! When you walked through that door, they didn't see you at all. They saw dollar signs all dressed up in rust-colored suede shoes, a rust beret, and a green slack suit!" I was despondent and bitter for weeks.

Alice struck me as being mature, trustworthy and stable. So I asked her to keep my money for me. At first, I used to hide my money in the bushes, but I'd go crazy worrying about $1000 out there in an old tin can or an old crumpled paper bag under a rock. So I asked Alice to keep it for me. $865. I was less worried. Alice smiled at me every day. I no longer woried about the narks catching me with all that money in my pocket, which I couldn't explain. Then one evening, Alice, walking with her son, got hit by a car. I went to General Hospital to see her. She was in traction, her leg broken, ribs busted, stitches in her skull, teeth knocked out. "Your money is in my closet, inside a Kotex box on the shelf." When I got there, the closet door was wide open and the Kotex box gone. I tore the whole closet up: nothing. $865! Francis was my number one suspect, then Alice's brother, Roger. His wife, Genevieve, starting making out with me, giving me the come on. A perfect crime; whoever did it got away clean. $865! I suspected everybody—except Alice. Months later, she got out of the hospital, but I stopped going around her pad. Couldn't stand the mystery. Months after that I came around. I was surprised to see all her new furniture. Redwood tables built on a Japanese kick. Overstuffed couch with matching chairs. Floor lamp that could be adjusted to three pitches of brightness. Twins. TV. That was Frank's money; I had to make it all up. Ran me in the red. Took me six months to balance the books.

Richard and Rudy used to taunt me: "At least I got a mother!" My most beautiful cap could be crumbled by that one all-purpose retort; that was the ace up their sleeve. Then one day their mother, Ruthie, ran off with Kinkie, the junk man. Richard and Rudy wore long faces then. I got my revenge for several years of torture.

The Savages. Someone put out that they were Communists. We gave them no peace: firecrackers through the mail slot in their front door, piss in their milk bottles, stolen milk, overturned garbage cans, rocks through windows, lights turned out at the central switch box, clothes stolen from their clothes line, insults hurled, air let out of their car tires at night to surprise them of a cold morning when they arose late for work.

There was something rigid in me, an inarticulate opposition, a dissent, that turned me away from the counsel of Dr. Smith.

Mona Phelps. Monica Laura. Rose Holquin. The Beach. The crabs. Van Pelt. Embarrassed mother. No father.

Part II

The Black Moochie

A Novella by Eldridge Cleaver

WHAT DID I KNOW? The sun hung bright in a hazy sky over Rose Hill. Nothing stirred during the day except the tortured housewives, salesmen, milkmen, mailmen, occasional policemen, little children and the hustlers. I wasn't really hitting on anything. I was far from conquering the world, yet I didn't feel at its mercy. It was as though I had stepped outside the world, outside the system. I was not caught up in anybody's program or plan. In those days the world looked like a huge, swiftly spinning merry-go-round. And I was not on it; I was not running it. I didn't know who controlled it, how it worked, or what its mechanism was. This was the source of my humiliation—that I was failing, that I could not see my way to mastering this merry-go-round.

I was lying on my side, on the grass beneath a tree, watching the merry-go-round in its spin. I was drunk with a loathing

for my own impotence. In my fantasy I saw, inside the City Hall, a huge room which I called, for whatever obscure, private reason, "the Map Room." In the Map Room, in the center of the Map Room, was a large table on which there was a big, ten-layer cake in the shape of Los Angeles County. Gathered round the table were 13 fat, greedy white businessmen and politicians. The Mayor, City Councilmen, County Supervisors, the Police Chief, the Sheriff, the President of the Chamber of Commerce and a Cardinal. The President of the C of C wielded the knife. A Negro in a khaki uniform, well starched and tailor-made, stood beneath the table with a broom and dustpan, catching the crumbs and dumping them into a large stainless steel barrel. His job was to see to it that not a crumb hit the floor. His incentive was that all the crumbs he caught belonged to him; he could take them home to his wife and 69 children.

"Cut me a larger piece," the Mayor said in a whining voice. He was hunched up to the table, an unctuous look on his face.

"If I give you a larger piece," said the President of the Chamber of Commerce, "there won't be enough to go around."

The President continued slicing up the cake, working swiftly, shoveling it out. He gave a huge slice to the Chief of Police and a smaller slice to the Sheriff. The Sheriff wore a sullen look, but he didn't speak out in protest as the Mayor had; he drew up into a tight little knot and slinked off into a corner to gobble down his share. He looked around craftily, as if he had something up his sleeve, as if he didn't have anything to worry about and would get even in the end.

Superimposed upon this picture, but down in the lower left-hand corner, was a scene of six Negroes crowded around a pool table, shooting pool. All wore sullen scowls on their faces. The jukebox blared the blues in the background. A girl, naked except for a red ribbon through her hair, huge golden earrings and another red ribbon worn lasciviously over her vagina at right angles to her cleft, and wearing red high-heel slippers, twisted and turned to the music, sending undulating waves of erotic rhythm through the room. The pool player whose turn it was to shoot stepped forward into the circle of light. His face was a hideous composite: he resembled every black man I had ever known. In his face I could see myself, my father, my uncles, my brothers; I could see John, Bobby, Buster; I could see Joe Louis, General Banks. With a vicious succession of plunges with the cue, he sent the balls crashing into the pockets with thunderous cracks. Looking at the two pictures—of the Map Room in City Hall and the Pool Room in the City Dump—it seemed as if the movements of the people in each were synchronized. At the same time that the President of the Commerce Chamber sliced off a piece of cake with the knife, the Big Mo plunged forward with his pool cue. And every time Stella made a movement with her body, the Cardinal would sprinkle Holy Water over a guest, ring a little silver bell or wave the heavy, golden, jewel-encrusted crucifix which hung around his neck.

The Cardinal wandered perpetually through the Map Room, sprinkling Holy Water, smiling and waving his cross. When the President of the Commerce Chamber offered him a piece of cake, he looked offended and refused vigorously, thrusting the proffered slice of cake aside. He went on sprinkling the guests with Holy Water and ringing the bell. Everyone smiled, including the Chief of Police. Instead of giving the slice of cake which the Cardinal had refused to another guest, the President walked over into a dark corner to a little black table where a silver tray rested on an immaculate white silk napkin. and laid the slice of cake on this tray. It seemed like the natural thing to do, as if the table and silver tray had been placed there precisely for that purpose.

The Negro beneath the main table had his eyes on that juicy slice of cake. He felt that he had dibs on it. He resolved to wait until there was a lull at the main table, rush over, scoop up the slice of cake from the silver tray, and dump it into his stainless steel receptacle. Self-satisfied, he felt that he had a perfect plan. After waiting a bit, he decided that his chance had come. He laid down his dustpan and broom and was just preparing to dash over when he saw the Cardinal stop at the table, gently set his Holy Water and bell down, reach beneath his red tunic, pull out a plastic bag and with a few swift motions scoop up the slice of cake. In one continuous motion, he broke the slice of cake in half, wrapped one half in the plastic bag and concealed it under his tunic. Then he plunged the other half into his mouth and chewed vigorously. After a moment, he picked up the vessel of Holy Water and raised it to his lips. He washed the cake down with Holy Water, almost emptying the vessel. Then, mumbling in Latin, he began picking the crumbs off the silver tray, putting each crumb on the tip of his unusually long tongue. He didn't leave a single crumb on the tray.

Just as he picked up his silver bell, he noticed the Negro beneath the table staring at him like a frozen statue, with open mouth and wide bug eyes. The Cardinal, shaken by the intensity and surprise of the stare but quickly recovering, smiled at the Negro and, tossing a few drops of Holy Water his way, tinkled his bell in the Negro's direction and resumed his itinerary around the room. At the sound of the bell, the Negro snapped back to reality, shaking his head in bewildered disappointment as though he still did not believe what his eyes had seen. He concluded that he must have been dreaming. He picked up his dustpan and broom and, after carefully sweeping up a small pile of crumbs that had accumulated while he was preoccupied with the slice of cake on the silver tray, resumed catching the last of the crumbs as they fell. He worked with more enthusiasm than ever, glad that the party was about over so that he could be getting home to his wife and children.

On the wall, witty sayings:

God And I Are One—Cardinal Spareendtire.

Let Them Eat Cake—Marie Antoinette.

God Uses Cost Accounting In His Battle With Satan—
Charlie Wilson.

WE DID WHAT WE HAD TO in the ways that we knew. We took what we wanted whenever we could. The street light was a marvel. Sewers were out of sight. The cops cruised by with a case of hips. We'd see them, and even when we had committed no crime we shunned them, because just being who we were was a crime in their eyes. They had black and white cars—these L.A.P.D. boys—so we called them the Black and Whites to distinguish them from the narcotics officers and detectives whose cars were unmarked. Somehow we feared the Black and Whites less. We watched them for traffic violations, but for the rough stuff, we looked out for the bulls in plain clothes.

Shames

We did not do these things; rather, they were done to us. But we felt guilty. Our terror was knee deep. We walked in a fog. Nowhere was there a way out. We grew up, grew older, and kept a keen eye out for a chance to move toward the future. We have played this cold role. Seldom in history has a people been called upon to perform these heroics. We made something out of nothing. We learned the wisdom in the sayings that "The shade of a toothpick beats the hot boiling sun," that "A drowning man would reach for a straw," and that "A nigger's freedom is in his mind." Even if we had expected or desired a pat on the back, there was none forthcoming. What we got was more hell. So we learned to boast of it. We owe these devils nothing, we would say. A white man has no rights which a black man is bound to respect, i.e., the slavemaster has no rights which the slave is bound to respect. We had a unique problem, and a unique problem requires a unique solution. So we bored into the mud of North America and waited for something unique to come along.

Fruitie was unique. First of all, she was skinny, with bony legs that were always either ashy or shiny. Her teeth looked like they had been shaken up in the cup of two hands and then tossed into her mouth all at once, sticking out in whatever way they landed. Kissing her was like trying to kiss a cactus apple—which was her price. To fuck her, you had to suck her tongue first. Torture. This titless girl. The only thing good about her was her juicy, warm glove of a cunt. Once you got it in, you forgot all about her wild teeth and flat chest. She had a way of rolling her ass on your rod that made you close your eyes and just let go. It was then that she could really get you to suck her tongue or even kiss those faint rises of flesh on her chest that were her tits. Fruitie was unique.

On the train from Arkansas to Phoenix there were only me, Helen, Wilhelmina and maybe James. We ran out of food. The porters were supposed to feed us according to a deal they had made with daddy, who was working on the railroad then, but on another line. A white lady sitting in a seat across from us gave us chicken. I no longer feel the pain of that day's hunger, but at the time I must have really been in pain, because I've learned how hateful hunger can be. And it was a five or six day ride from Little Rock to Phoenix. These people were taking care of business. The war was going on. Here we were, a few among thousands, in the great population shift of hundreds of thousands pouring out of the South heading West for jobs, for opportunities in California. Later, people would taunt each other that Kaiser had brought them out of the big foot country. All those wide-eyed people staring at each other, into those mute faces, seeking some hint of a future anticipated with a growing terror.

When I looked around, it seemed like there were orange trees lined up neatly along the sidewalk on both sides of the street, from horizon to horizon, each tree decorated with golden fruit like off-color Christmas trees. But this must have been the workings of my youthful mind. The Union Station is where we got off the train from Phoenix, Arizona. That our luggage got lost was only to be expected. As far as our family was concerned, all had been lost for some time now. Mother was pregnant in a black dress. She had red shoes on, garish like the country woman of her being. A high-yeller belle from Little Rock, Arkansas, by way of Phoenix. But she was game, pregnant or not. She found our bags, trunks, boxes, and got us all loaded in a cab, and there was daddy with a truck. Just like that: one minute we were lost in a chaos that seemed too far gone to reclaim, and then the next minute we were in a cab breezing down Central Avenue. Magic was possible in those days. The next minute we were carrying our things into a house. Then mother was taking me to school the first day, where the boys teased me about my bangs and because I said "over yonder" and "chunk me the ball." They said I was "countrified." I had to fight them to prove I was human. When they saw that I knew how to bloody their noses, they showed me their teeth in smiles and showed me how to get my bangs cut down to L.A. size.

It was in that house that music came alive for me. Before that, music may not even have existed. Songs like "I Wonder," by Cecil Gant, never stopped playing. These Negro blues swept into my soul and excited the very core of my being. I had found an anchor for one corner of my life. Since then, these sounds have never ended for me.

Gladys ran that house. She rented space by the room. Everybody who had a room to spare rented it to the thousands of Negroes pouring into the East Side each month. The devils would not let them live anywhere else. Negroes were channeled onto the South Los Angeles Reservation like oil being pumped into a dumping ground. Gladys was always arguing and cursing with somebody, threatening to kill somebody, screaming at somebody to cut down their radio or record player. Everyone was always running through the house screaming and cursing. The rooms were separated by curtains slung across the doors. You might be eating and a woman would run through naked and screaming, a man running behind her with a long knife in his hand. "We got to move out of here, Leroy," Mother told daddy time after time. "This place is driving me crazy!" Or

sometimes you'd walk through someone's room and see them on the bed intertwined and grooving in the heat of their grinding. They'd pause long enough for you to pass through and as you secured the curtain behind you, you'd hear the bed start squeaking again as they tried to catch up to where they'd been before you interrupted them.

The Coca Cola Bottling Company on Central Avenue looked like a big battleship on the ground. There were portholes in the walls. We'd pass by and look in at the men working. The building was long and smooth and new. Everything else was ragged and falling down. On Sundays we'd go to the Rosebud Theater on Central Avenue, or to the Jinx Theater. Or, to splurge, we'd go to the Lincoln Theater. At night they played Keno, and silver dollars were to be won if you were lucky. The black people were all around you, making lots of beautiful black people's noise, raising hell. Fights broke out in the balcony. Girls screamed in the dark. Cigarette smoke curled up through the lights streaming from the movie projectors. People were constantly coming and going.

On Sundays, Negroes would dress up and walk up and down the street looking at each other. It was like a parade or carnival. Cars filled with black, brown and yellow faces drove up and down the Stem, music blasting from their radios. Jukeboxes blasted different songs back to back. You could walk from one end of the Stem to the other and never be beyond the sound of music, black voices screaming out the blue funk of black lives. The Stem. Central Avenue. The different lives I've led on the Stem and the lives taken from me by the Stem. These lives lie upon one another like layers of skin, floors of a skyscraper, tiers of a cellblock, layers of a tall cake. These years and these days, changing hourly, are the icing between each layer, and my present self is spread over the top like blood trickling down an obsolete wall, soaking into the sod of me on the bottom.

PAT MOORE'S SHOP WAS UPSTAIRS, over the Club Alabam. I wanted my hair gassed, so Chester took me to Pat Moore's, complaining every step of the way that I was a fool. I wanted to please Lupe. I was 17, Lupe was 26—a woman over the flip little girls I'd been catching up till her. I wanted to impress her with how slick a cat I was. Pat Moore sat me in the barber's chair and draped a sheet over my shoulders, like a KKK man without his hood. Then he started greasing me down, spreading a thick gooey muck over my skin along the hairline, then rubbing it into my scalp to protect the flesh from the violent action of the hair-straightening chemicals he was about to apply. "If it gets too hot and burns more than you can stand, jus' hollar," Pat said. Taking a rubber spatula, he began slapping the gas onto my head in big [illegible] lumps, like a woman slapping lard into a hot skillet. Taking a comb, he slowly worked the gas into my hair, inserting the comb at the front of my head and pulling it straight back along the curve of my skull to the end of my hair at the base of my neck.

Soon the comb was running through my hair without any opposition from the kinks. In a moment every last kink had been murdered outright, and each strand of my hair was stretched out on my head like an elongated corpse on a barroom floor. "You be looking like Rudolph Valentino in a minute," Pat said. The shit was beginning to burn my skull, but I didn't say anything. I wanted to leave it in as long as I could, because I had been schooled to the fact that, up to a certain crucial point, the longer you left the gas in, the straighter your hair became. If you left it in beyond that crucial point, then the acids and lye in the gas would eat all the hair off your head, would eat all the skin off, in fact theoretically it could eat your whole head off, bone and all. "O.K., Pat," I said, bolting from the chair at last. "Get this shit out quick, man." Pat led me to the sink and bent my head over it. Using a little green hose with a spray nozzle attached to it, he rinsed and washed and rinsed my head until every last trace of the gas was washed away, leaving a crop of weird-looking hair standing all over my head. (Looking back, these strands of hair impress me as the perfect metaphor for the anarchy existing among so-called Negroes in America. Each strand was a stranger to the other; each stood alone. They resembled a mob rather than an organized mass. Each strand seemed to be stumbling around blindly, seeking its true identity, seeing nothing of itself in the strands around it.) Pat said, "Now how do you want to wear it, my man? Want me to fingerwave it or set it in the pachuco style with a ducktail in the back?" "Stick fingerwaves to me, baby," I said. And Pat went to work. When he finished, I had a do just like Nat King Cole. Had I chosen the pachuco, I'd be looking like Sammy Davis Jr.

I could hardly wait to get back to Rose Hill to see Lupe that night. I went home and took a bath, careful not to wet my hair or move my head too violently for fear of shaking out the waves. When I met Lupe that night, under the clothesline next to Francis' pad at the end of the row of apartments in the Projects, she said in her Mexican accent: "Eeeek! What happened to your hair?" She led me out of the darkness into a patch of light cast by the street light up at the top of the hill. "What did you do to your hair?" she asked in a most horrified tone. "You've ruined it!" she said, and tried to touch my hair. I knew that if she touched it she would knock the waves out. Gasses are for looking at, not for touching. "No!" I cautioned her, "don't touch it or you'll mess it up." "You're crazy, Leroy!" she said. "I don't like your hair that way. I like it fuzzy like it was!" Then, crying, she wrenched herself violently from my arms and ran into her house.

Weaving back and forth, in and out of these other lives, a boy goes on his way. Where his nose is headed he hardly has the sense to ask. He simply goes, following his own feet. And what a chase. The basic reality was the marijuana. The yesca, the life stuff of the boy's existence. From the moment when Chico cuts him into getting high, he rapidly develops as a wise handler of the weed. More than his wisdom was his availability. How he scampered about those hills with the bag.

Weighing out the pounds. Sacking up the cans. Rolling up the joints. Conscientious businessmen getting ready for the evening's trade. People coming from miles around to cop some of that good old Rose Hill marijuana, and we'd be there waiting for them with everything ready to go. Joints all rolled, cans ready at $7 each—our specialty. Then the pounds. The easy dollars. Easy Money. Good name for a book. Easy Come, Easy Go. One must tell a great deal about reality in order to justify writing a book, yet so many of these fools who tell nothing at all come off the presses again and again. When I write, I want to drive a spear into the heart of America.