



## ENG 301: American Literature

### 2022 Summer Reading

American Literature engages students in becoming skilled readers of any genre from a variety of periods, disciplines, and rhetorical contexts and in becoming skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes. This course will focus on the study of American literature where students will not only become aware of the great, controversial, and beautiful ideas contained in America's literary history, but also examine the interaction between the writer's purpose, subjects, and audience expectations. This summer you will begin this wonderful adventure by reading across genres, across time periods, and across themes.

#### View (optional):

- *Death of a Salesman*, [the 1985 made-for-television-film adaptation](#) of Arthur Miller's 1949 play of the same name starring Dustin Hoffman and John Malkovich.

#### Read (required):

- *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller (\*\*content warning: references to thoughts of death by suicide)
- Short pieces (provided in PDF form): "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker (short story), "Mother Tongue" by Amy Tan (essay), and "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner (short story)
- ONE individual choice book from the included list (See last page.)

Write (required): A response log is an effective way to keep a record of your reading responses (positive or negative, sure or unsure). It offers a chance to respond personally, to ask questions, to wonder, to predict, or to reflect on the characters, people, events, literary elements, writing techniques, or language of a text. Do not summarize! Instead, record your textual observations.

Completion of the Reader Response Log for *Death of a Salesman* and for the shorter readings (Walker, Tan, or Faulkner which will be collected on the first day of class. (See below for directions and the rubric.)

The Response Journal: Complete a Response Log with **4 entries** for *Death of a Salesman* and **2 entries** for each of the shorter readings (Walker, Tan, and Faulkner) for a total of 10 entries. Response Log must have an MLA heading and formatting. Begin with two columns. Separate tables by text and clearly label each one.

### Format for Reading Log

| <p>Title the column on the left</p> <p>“Quotations from the Text”<br/>(include page number)</p>   | <p>Title the column on the right “Commentary/Responses to the Text”</p>   |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“The imagery reveals . . . “</i></p> <p><i>“The setting gives the effect of . . .”</i></p> <p><i>“The author seems to feel . . .”</i></p> <p><i>“The tone of this part is . . .”</i></p> <p><i>“The character(s) feel(s) . . .”</i></p> <p><i>“This is ironic because . . .”</i></p> <p><i>“An interesting metaphor or symbol is . . .”</i></p> <p><i>“The detail seems effective/out of place/important because . . .”</i></p> | <p><i>“An interesting word/phrase/sentence/thought is...”</i></p> <p><i>“This reminds me of...”</i></p> <p><i>“Something I notice/appreciate/don’t appreciate/wonder about is...”</i></p> <p><i>“The author emphasizes ----- in order to . . .”</i><br/><i>in order to... ”</i></p> <p>Or you may start with something else you feel is appropriate</p> |

Generally, each response to a quotation should be 3-5 sentences and should include analysis of the literary and rhetorical techniques present in the quotations, the author’s attitude, purpose or tone, and connection to personal experience.

You must include entries that range from the beginning to the end. Show me that you have read the entire text by responding to the book from the first to the last page. This means you will need to have paper and pen with you as you read or mark your quotations and complete the log after completing the novel.

Make sure that you note the page number for the quotes in the left-hand column. Your response log will be used to determine your comprehension of the text. Please remember that these logs are not meant to be personal diaries. They are meant to be read by others and should be related only to the assigned material. You will be sharing your logs in class, so keep this in mind as you write. When sharing, you will have the opportunity to confirm, clarify, and modify responses during discussion. You will also find that your response logs can be helpful in writing a literary and rhetorical analysis of the text.

*\*\*\*I do not expect you to be an expert at analyzing rhetorical techniques (yet), so don't panic if you don't know what to do here. We are going to spend nearly the entire class working with rhetorical analysis. Focus on using the analytical techniques you learned in your previous English classes.*

*Academic Integrity: As with every class assignment, all summer reading work should be original – do not consult online resources, or collaborate with peers on this assignment. Give yourself plenty of time to complete this assignment in a thoughtful and thorough manner. I am interested in your original thoughts and ideas, not another person's insights or observations.*

Individual Choice Text: Select at least ONE to read

The list below contains a variety of subjects and genres that in some way relate to America; the goal is to engage students by providing a wide range of texts to choose from, while also representing a variety of perspectives and voices. Hopefully, you will find at least one text that piques your interest!

**\*\*Parents and students are encouraged to research individual choice texts, as the content varies.**

Common Sense Media ([www.common sense media.com](http://www.common sense media.com)), Goodreads ([www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)), and Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)) are excellent resources to consult and will help in determining if the content of a text aligns with your family's individual media guidelines. If you are unsure of what book you may enjoy, ask a member of the English Department—we love talking about books, and can recommend a text from this list based on your interests! Parents are encouraged to read the texts in tandem with their child, as this creates the opportunity for dialogue about what they are reading and how they are responding to the texts.\*\*

#### Autobiography / Memoir

- *Educated* by Tara Westover
- *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston
- *Hollywood Park* by Mikel Jollett
- *Naked* by David Sedaris
- *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalinithi
- *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls
- *Beautiful Boy: Father's Journey through His Son's Addiction* by David Sheff
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou (\*\*content warning: depictions of sexual assault)
- *127 Hours: Between a Rock and a Hard Place* by Aaron Ralston

#### Fiction

- *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton
- *A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley
- *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan
- *A Woman is No Man* by Etan Rum (\*\*content warning: references to death by suicide, depictions of domestic violence)
- *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers

- *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury
- *Passing* by Nella Larsen
- *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead
- *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien (\*\*content warning: depictions of graphic violence during war)
- *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri
- *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey
- *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche
- *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri
- *There There* by Tommy Orange
- *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich (\*\*content warning: references to sexual assault, and depictions of violence)

True Crime (\*\*content warning: all of the texts below include references to real-life crime, as well as descriptions of crime scenes and the crime themselves)

- *The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson
- *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote
- *American Sherlock: Murder, Forensics, and the Birth of American CSI* by Kate Winkler Dawson

#### Nonfiction

- *The Radium Girls: The Dark Story of America's Shining Women* by Kate Moore
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skolnik
- *Code Girls: The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II* by Liza Mundy
- *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly



Alice Walker

(b. 1944)

## Everyday Use

Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning epistolary novel *The Color Purple* (1982) and its 1985 film version have made her the most famous black woman writer in contemporary America, perhaps the most widely read of any American woman of color. A native of Eatonton, Georgia, Walker was the eighth child of an impoverished farm couple. She attended Spelman College in Atlanta and Sarah Lawrence College in New York on scholarships, graduating in 1965. Walker began her literary career as a poet, eventually publishing six volumes of poetry. Her short story collections and novels, including *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), which takes as its subject the controversial practice of female circumcision among African tribes, continue to reach large audiences and have solidified her reputation as one of the major figures in contemporary literature. Walker has coined the term "womanist" to stand for the black feminist concerns of much of her fiction. "Everyday Use," a story from the early 1970s, is simultaneously a satisfying piece of realistic social commentary and a subtly satirical variation on the ancient fable of the city mouse and the country mouse.

*For your grandmama*

I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny,

irregular grooves anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house.

- 2 Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eyeing her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that "no" is a word the world never learned to say to her.
- 3 You've no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.
- 4 Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.
- 5 In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing. I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.
- 6 But that is a mistake. I know even before I wake up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature.

7        "How do I look, Mama?" Maggie says, showing just enough of her thin  
body enveloped in pink skirt and red blouse for me to know she's there, almost  
hidden by the door.

8        "Come out into the yard," I say.

9        Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless  
person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to  
be kind to him? That is the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin  
on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other  
house to the ground.

10        Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She's a  
woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other  
house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel  
Maggie's arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her  
in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the  
flames reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum  
tree she used to dig gum out of; a look of concentration on her face as she  
watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick  
chimney. Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? I'd wanted to ask her. She  
had hated the house that much.

11        I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But that was before we raised the  
money, the church and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She used to read to us  
without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two,  
sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of  
make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to  
know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the  
moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

12        Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation  
from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she'd made from an old  
suit somebody gave me. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her  
efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time. Often I fought off  
the temptation to shake her. At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what  
style was.

13        I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed  
down. Don't ask me why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do  
now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but  
can't see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quick-  
ness passed her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an  
earnest face) and then I'll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to  
myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was  
always better at a man's job. I used to love to milk till I was hoofed in the side

in '49. Cows are soothing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way.

14 I have deliberately turned my back on the house. It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make shingle roofs any more. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the port-holes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we "choose" to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends. Maggie and I thought about this and Maggie asked me, "Mama, when did Dee ever *have* any friends?"

15 She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hanging about on washday after school. Nervous girls who never laughed. Impressed with her they worshiped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the scalding humor that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them.

16 When she was courting Jimmy T she didn't have much time to pay to us, but turned all her faultfinding power on him. He *flew* to marry a cheap gal from a family of ignorant flashy people. She hardly had time to recompose herself.

17 When she comes I will meet—but there they are!

18 Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. "Come back here," I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe.

19 It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhhnnh," is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhhnnh."

20 Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings, too, gold and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhhnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pig-tails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

21 "Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!" she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all

grinning and he follows up with "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!" He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin.

22 "Don't get up," says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie and the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

23 Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through the motions with Maggie's hand. Maggie's hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie.

24 "Well," I say. "Dee."

25 "No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"

26 "What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.

27 "She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer being named after the people who oppress me."

28 "You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

29 "But who was *she* named after?" asked Wangero.

30 "I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.

31 "And who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

32 "Her mother," I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. "That's about as far back as I can trace it," I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

33 "Well," said Asalamalakim, "there you are."

34 "Uhhnnh," I heard Maggie say.

35 "There I was not," I said, "before 'Dicie' cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?"

36 He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head.

37 "How do you pronounce this name?" I asked.

38 "You don't have to call me by it if you don't want to," said Wangero.

39 "Why shouldn't I?" I asked. "If that's what you want us to call you, we'll call you."

40 "I know it might sound awkward at first," said Wangero.

41 "I'll get used to it," I said. "Ream it out again."

42 Well, soon we got the name out of the way. Asalamalakim had a name twice as long and three times as hard. After I tripped over it two or three times he told me to just to call him Hakim-a-barber. I wanted to ask him was he a barber, but I didn't really think he was, so I didn't ask.

43 "You must belong to those beef-cattle peoples down the road," I said. They said "Asalamalakim" when they met you, too, but they didn't shake hands. Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay. When the white folks poisoned some of the herd the men stayed up all night with rifles in their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see the sight.

44 Hakim-a-barber said, "I accept some of their doctrines, but farming and raising cattle is not my style." (They didn't tell me, and I didn't ask, whether Wangero [Dee] had really gone and married him.)

45 We sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins and corn bread, the greens and everything else. She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs.

46 "Oh, Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn stood, the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.

47 "This churn top is what I need," she said. "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?"

48 "Yes," I said.

49 "Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too."

50 "Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the barber.

51 Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

52 "Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash."

53 "Maggie's brain is like an elephant's," Wangero said, laughing. "I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," she said, sliding a plate over the churn, "and I'll think of something artistic to do with the dasher."

54 When she finished wrapping the dasher the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn't even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and

fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived.

55 After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the piece of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

56 "Mama," Wangero said sweet as a bird. "Can I have these old quilts?"

57 I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.

58 "Why don't you take one or two of the others?" I asked. "These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died."

59 "No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."

60 "That's make them last better," I said.

61 "That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

62 "Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

63 "Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

64 "The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

65 She gasped like a bee had stung her.

66 "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

67 "I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

68 "But they're *priceless*!" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

69 "She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

70        Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand.  
The point is these quilts, *these* quilts!"

71        "Well," I said, stumped. "What would *you* do with them?"

72        "Hang them," she said. As if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts.

73        Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

74        "She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

75        I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work.

76        When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open.

77        "Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee.

78        But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber.

79        "You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

80        "What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

81        "Your heritage," she said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."

82        She put on some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and her chin.

83        Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

## Mother Tongue, by Amy Tan

I am not a scholar of English or literature. I cannot give you much more than personal opinions on the English language and its variations in this country or others.

I am a writer. And by that definition, I am someone who has always loved language. I am fascinated by language in daily life. I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language -- the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth. Language is the tool of my trade. And I use them all -- all the Englishes I grew up with.

Recently, I was made keenly aware of the different Englishes I do use. I was giving a talk to a large group of people, the same talk I had already given to half a dozen other groups. The nature of the talk was about my writing, my life, and my book, *The Joy Luck Club*. The talk was going along well enough, until I remembered one major difference that made the whole talk sound wrong. My mother was in the room. And it was perhaps the first time she had heard me give a lengthy speech, using the kind of English I have never used with her. I was saying things like, "The intersection of memory upon imagination" and "There is an aspect of my fiction that relates to thus-and-thus"--a speech filled with carefully wrought grammatical phrases, burdened, it suddenly seemed to me, with nominalized forms, past perfect tenses, conditional phrases, all the forms of standard English that I had learned in school and through books, the forms of English I did not use at home with my mother.

Just last week, I was walking down the street with my mother, and I again found myself conscious of the English I was using, the English I do use with her. We were talking about the price of new and used furniture and I heard myself saying this: "Not waste money that way." My husband was with us as well, and he didn't notice any switch in my English. And then I realized why. It's because over the twenty years we've been together I've often used that same kind of English with him, and sometimes he even uses it with me. It has become our language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to family talk, the language I grew up with.

So you'll have some idea of what this family talk I heard sounds like, I'll quote what my mother said during a recent conversation which I videotaped and then transcribed. During this conversation, my mother was talking about a political gangster in Shanghai who had the same last name as her family's, Du, and how the gangster in his early years wanted to be adopted by her family, which was rich by comparison. Later, the gangster became more powerful, far richer than my mother's family, and one day showed up at my mother's wedding to pay his respects. Here's what she said in part: "Du Yusong having business like fruit stand. Like off the street kind. He is Du like Du Zong -- but not Tsung-ming Island people. The local people call putong, the river east side, he belong to that side local people. That man want to ask Du Zong father take him in like become own family. Du Zong father wasn't look down on him, but didn't take seriously, until that man big like become a mafia. Now important person, very hard to inviting him. Chinese way, came only to show respect, don't stay for dinner. Respect for making big celebration, he shows up. Mean gives lots of respect. Chinese custom. Chinese social life that way. If too important won't have to stay too long. He come to my wedding. I didn't see, I heard it. I gone to boy's side, they have YMCA dinner. Chinese age I was nineteen."

You should know that my mother's expressive command of English belies how much she actually understands. She reads the Forbes report, listens to Wall Street Week, converses daily with her stockbroker, reads all of Shirley MacLaine's books with ease--all kinds of things I can't begin to understand. Yet some of my friends tell me they understand 50 percent of what my mother says. Some say they understand 80 to 90 percent. Some say they understand none of it, as if she were speaking pure Chinese. But to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of observation and imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world.

Lately, I've been giving more thought to the kind of English my mother speaks. Like others, I have described it to people as "broken" or "fractured" English. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than "broken," as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness. I've heard other terms used, "limited English," for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people's perceptions of the limited English speaker.

I know this for a fact, because when I was growing up, my mother's "limited" English limited my perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say. That is, because she expressed them imperfectly her thoughts were imperfect. And I had plenty of empirical evidence to support me: the fact that people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her.

My mother has long realized the limitations of her English as well. When I was fifteen, she used to have me call people on the phone to pretend I was she. In this guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at people who had been rude to her. One time it was a call to her stockbroker in New York. She had cashed out her small portfolio and it just so happened we were going to go to New York the next week, our very first trip outside California. I had to get on the phone and say in an adolescent voice that was not very convincing, "This is Mrs. Tan."

And my mother was standing in the back whispering loudly, "Why he don't send me check, already two weeks late. So mad he lie to me, losing me money."

And then I said in perfect English, "Yes, I'm getting rather concerned. You had agreed to send the check two weeks ago, but it hasn't arrived."

Then she began to talk more loudly. "What he want, I come to New York tell him front of his boss, you cheating me?" And I was trying to calm her down, make her be quiet, while telling the stockbroker, "I can't tolerate any more excuses. If I don't receive the check immediately, I am going to have to speak to your manager when I'm in New York next week." And sure enough, the following week there we were in front of this astonished stockbroker, and I was sitting there red-faced and quiet, and my mother, the real Mrs. Tan, was shouting at his boss in her impeccable broken English.

We used a similar routine just five days ago, for a situation that was far less humorous. My mother had gone to the hospital for an appointment, to find out about a benign brain tumor a CAT scan had revealed a month ago. She said she had spoken very good English, her best English, no mistakes. Still, she said, the hospital did not apologize when they said they had lost the CAT scan and she had come for nothing. She said they did not seem to have any sympathy when she told them she was anxious to know the exact diagnosis, since her husband and son had both died of brain tumors. She said they would not give her any more information until the next time and she would have to make another appointment for that. So she said she would not leave until the doctor called her daughter. She wouldn't budge. And when the doctor finally called her daughter, me, who spoke in perfect English -- lo and behold -- we had assurances the CAT scan would be found, promises that a conference call on Monday would be held, and apologies for any suffering my mother had gone through for a most regrettable mistake.

I think my mother's English almost had an effect on limiting my possibilities in life as well. Sociologists and linguists probably will tell you that a person's developing language skills are more influenced by peers. But I do think that the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child. And I believe that it affected my results on achievement tests, I.Q. tests, and the SAT. While my English skills were never judged as poor, compared to math, English could not be considered my strong suit. In grade school I did moderately well, getting perhaps B's, sometimes B-plus, in English and scoring perhaps in the sixtieth or seventieth percentile on

achievement tests. But those scores were not good enough to override the opinion that my true abilities lay in math and science, because in those areas I achieved A's and scored in the ninetieth percentile or higher.

This was understandable. Math is precise; there is only one correct answer. Whereas, for me at least, the answers on English tests were always a judgment call, a matter of opinion and personal experience. Those tests were constructed around items like fill-in-the-blank sentence completion, such as, "Even though Tom was, Mary thought he was --." And the correct answer always seemed to be the most bland combinations of thoughts, for example, "Even though Tom was shy, Mary thought he was charming:" with the grammatical structure "even though" limiting the correct answer to some sort of semantic opposites, so you wouldn't get answers like, "Even though Tom was foolish, Mary thought he was ridiculous:" Well, according to my mother, there were very few limitations as to what Tom could have been and what Mary might have thought of him. So I never did well on tests like that

The same was true with word analogies, pairs of words in which you were supposed to find some sort of logical, semantic relationship -- for example, "Sunset is to nightfall as is to ." And here you would be presented with a list of four possible pairs, one of which showed the same kind of relationship: red is to stoplight, bus is to arrival, chills is to fever, yawn is to boring: Well, I could never think that way. I knew what the tests were asking, but I could not block out of my mind the images already created by the first pair, "sunset is to nightfall"--and I would see a burst of colors against a darkening sky, the moon rising, the lowering of a curtain of stars. And all the other pairs of words --red, bus, stoplight, boring--just threw up a mass of confusing images, making it impossible for me to sort out something as logical as saying: "A sunset precedes nightfall" is the same as "a chill precedes a fever." The only way I would have gotten that answer right would have been to imagine an associative situation, for example, my being disobedient and staying out past sunset, catching a chill at night, which turns into feverish pneumonia as punishment, which indeed did happen to me.

I have been thinking about all this lately, about my mother's English, about achievement tests. Because lately I've been asked, as a writer, why there are not more Asian Americans represented in American literature. Why are there few Asian Americans enrolled in creative writing programs? Why do so many Chinese students go into engineering! Well, these are broad sociological questions I can't begin to answer. But I have noticed in surveys -- in fact, just last week -- that Asian students, as a whole, always do significantly better on math achievement tests than in English. And this makes me think that there are other Asian-American students whose English spoken in the home might also be described as "broken" or "limited." And perhaps they also have teachers who are steering them away from writing and into math and science, which is what happened to me.

Fortunately, I happen to be rebellious in nature and enjoy the challenge of disproving assumptions made about me. I became an English major my first year in college, after being enrolled as pre-med. I started writing nonfiction as a freelancer the week after I was told by my former boss that writing was my worst skill and I should hone my talents toward account management.

But it wasn't until 1985 that I finally began to write fiction. And at first I wrote using what I thought to be wittily crafted sentences, sentences that would finally prove I had mastery over the English language. Here's an example from the first draft of a story that later made its way into *The Joy Luck Club*, but without this line: "That was my mental quandary in its nascent state." A terrible line, which I can barely pronounce.

Fortunately, for reasons I won't get into today, I later decided I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided upon was my mother, because these were stories about mothers. So with this reader in mind -- and in fact she did read my early drafts--I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as "simple"; the English she used with me, which for lack of a better term might be described as "broken"; my translation of her Chinese, which could certainly be described as "watered down"; and what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither an English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to

capture what language ability tests can never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts.

Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: "So easy to read."

# Sunrise, Sunset

By Edwidge Danticat September 11, 2017



**I**t comes on again on her grandson's christening day. A lost moment, a blank spot, one that Carole does not know how to measure. She is there one second, then she is not. She knows exactly where she is, then she does not. Her older church friends tell similar stories about their surgeries, how they count backward from ten with an oxygen mask over their faces, then wake up before reaching one, only to find that hours, and sometimes even days, have gone by. She feels as though she were experiencing the same thing.

Her son-in-law, James, a dreadlocked high-school math teacher, is holding her grandson, Jude, who has inherited her daughter's globe-shaped head, penny-colored skin, and long fingers, which he wraps around Carole's chin whenever she holds him. Jude is a lively giggler. His whole body shakes when he laughs. Carole often stares at him for hours, hoping that his chubby face will bring back memories of her own children at that age, memories that are quickly slipping away.

Her daughter, Jeanne, is still about sixty pounds overweight on Jude's christening day, seven months after his birth. Jeanne is so miserable about this—and who knows what else—that she spends most days in her bedroom, hiding.

Since her daughter is stuck in a state of mental fragility, Carole welcomes the opportunity to join Jude's other grandmother, Grace, in watching their grandson as often as she's asked. Carole likes to entertain Jude with whatever children's songs and peekaboo games she can still remember, including one she calls *Solèy Leve, Solèy Kouche*—Sunrise, Sunset—which she used to play with her children. She drapes a black sheet over her grandson's playpen and pronounces it "sunset," then takes the sheet off and calls it "sunrise." Her grandson does not seem to mind when she gets confused and reverses the order. He doesn't know the difference anyway.

Sometimes Carole forgets who Grace is and mistakes her for the nanny. She does, however, remember that Grace disapproved of her son's marrying Jeanne, whom she believed was beneath him. That censure now seems justified by Jeanne's failures as a mother.

Jeanne, Carole thinks, has never known real tragedy. Growing up in a country ruled by a merciless dictator, Carole watched her neighbors being dragged out of their houses by

the dictator's denim-uniformed henchmen. One of her aunts was beaten almost to death for throwing herself in front of her husband as he was being arrested. Carole's father left the country for Cuba when she was twelve and never returned. Her mother's only means of survival was cleaning the houses of people who were barely able to pay her. Carole's best friend lived next door, in another tin-roofed room, rented separately from the same landlord. During the night, while her mother slept, Carole often heard her friend being screamed at by her own mother, who seemed to hate her for being a burden. Carole tried so hard to protect her U.S.-born children from these stories that they are now incapable of overcoming any kind of sadness. Not so much her son, Paul, who is a minister, but Jeanne, whom she named after her childhood friend. Her daughter's psyche is so feeble that anything can rattle her. Doesn't she realize that the life she is living is an accident of fortune? Doesn't she know that she is an exception in this world, where it is normal to be unhappy, to be hungry, to work non-stop and earn next to nothing, and to suffer the whims of everything from tyrants to hurricanes and earthquakes?

The morning of her grandson's christening, Carole is wearing a long-sleeved white lace dress that she can't recall putting on. She has combed her hair back in a tight bun that now hurts a little.

Earlier in the week, she watched from the terrace of her daughter's third-floor apartment as Jeanne dipped her feet in the condo's kidney-shaped communal pool. She'd walked out onto the terrace to look at the water, the unusual cobalt-blue color it becomes in late afternoon and the slow ripple of its surface, even when untouched by a breeze or bodies.

"I won't christen him!" Jeanne was shouting on the phone. "That's her thing, not ours."

// e're up soon," James says, snapping Carole out of her reverie. He is using the tone of voice with which he speaks to Jude. It's clear that this is not the first time he's told her this.

Her daughter is looking neither at her nor at the congregation full of Carole's friends. She's not even looking at Jude, who has been dressed, most likely by James, in a plain white romper. Jeanne stares at the floor, as others take turns holding Jude and keeping him quiet in the church: first Grace, then Carole's husband, Victor, then James's

younger sister, Zoe, who is the godmother, then James's best friend, Marcos, the godfather.

Carole keeps reminding herself that her daughter is still young. Only thirty-two. Jeanne was once a happy young woman, a guidance counsellor at the school where James teaches. (When James and Jeanne were first married, their friends called them J.J.; then Jude was born, and the three of them became Triple J.) "She used to like children, right?" Carole sometimes asks Victor. "Before she had her son?"

When Jude's name is called from the pulpit by his uncle Paul, James motions for them to approach the altar. Paul, dressed in a long white ministerial robe, steps down from the pulpit and, while Jude is still in his father's arms, traces a cross on his forehead with scented oil. The oil bothers Jude's eyes and he wails. Undeterred, Paul takes Jude and begins praying so loudly that he shocks Jude into silence. After the prayer, he hands Jude back to his mother. Jeanne kisses her son's oil-soaked forehead and her eyes balloon with tears, either from the strong smell of the oil or from the emotions of the day.

Carole knows that her daughter is not enjoying any of this, but she has found comfort in such rituals and she believes that her grandson will not be protected against the world's evils—including his mother's lack of interest in him—until this one is performed.

Later, at the post-christening lunch at her daughter's apartment, Carole spots James and Jeanne walking out of their bedroom. Jude is in Jeanne's arms. They have changed the boy out of his plain romper into an even plainer sleeveless onesie. Jeanne stops in the doorway and lowers a bib over Jude's face and murmurs, "Sunset." Then she raises the bib and squeals, "Sunrise!" Watching her daughter play this game with the baby, Carole feels as though she herself were going through the motions, raising and lowering the bib. Not at this very moment but at some point in the hazy past. It's as if Jeanne had become Carole and James had become her once dapper and lanky husband, Victor, who now walks with a cane that he is always tapping against the ground. All is not lost, Carole thinks. Her daughter has learned a few things from her, after all. Then it returns again, that now familiar sensation of herself waning. What if this is the last day that she recalls anything? What if she never recognizes anyone again? What if she

forgets her husband? What if she stops remembering what it's like to

feeling that has changed so much over the years, in ways that her daughter's love for her own husband seems also to be changing, even though James, like Victor, is patient. She's never seen him shout at or scold Jeanne. He doesn't even tell her to get out of bed or pay more attention to their child. He tells Carole and his own mother that Jeanne just needs time. But how long will this kind of tolerance last? How long can anyone bear to live with someone whose mind wanders off to a place where their love no longer exists?

Carole's husband is the only one who knows how far along she is. He is constantly subjected to her sudden mood changes, her bursts of anger followed by total stillness. He has tried for years to help her hide her symptoms, or lessen them with puzzles and other educational games, with coconut oil and omega-3 supplements, which she takes with special juices and teas. He is always turning off appliances, finding keys she's stored in unusual places like the bathtub, the oven, or the freezer. He helps her finish sentences, nudges her to let her know if she has repeated something a few times. But maybe one day he will grow tired of this and put her in a home, where strangers will have to take care of her.

When Jude was born, Victor bought her a doll so that she could practice taking care of their grandson. It's a brown boy doll with a round face and tight peppercorn curls, like Jude's. When she puts the doll in the bath, its hair clings to its scalp, just like Jude's.

Bathing the doll, then dressing it before bed, makes her feel calm, helps her sleep more soundly. But this, like her illness, is still a secret between her husband and her, a secret that they may not be able to keep much longer.

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**H**ow do you become a good mother? Jeanne wants to ask someone, anyone. She wishes she'd been brave enough to ask her mother before her dementia, or

whatever it is that she is suffering from, set in. Her mother refuses to have tests done and get a definitive diagnosis, and her father is fine with that.

"You don't poke around for something you don't want to find," he's told her a few times.

Her father offers the first toast at the christening lunch. "To Jude, who brought us together today," he says in Creole, then in English.

James hands Jeanne a champagne glass, which she has trouble balancing while holding their son. Her mother puts her own glass down and reaches over and takes Jude from Jeanne's arms.

"I'll toast with him," Carole says, and Jeanne fears her mother may actually believe that Jude's body is a champagne glass. She is afraid these days to let her mother hold her son, to leave them alone together, but since she and James are close by and Jude isn't fussing or fidgeting she does not protest.

After the toast, James asks if he can get Jeanne and her mother a plate of food. Carole nods, then quickly changes her mind. "Maybe later," she says. Jude is looking up at her now, his baby eyes fixed on her wrinkled and weary-looking face.

Carole isn't eating much these days. Jeanne, on the other hand, feels as though a deep and sour hole were burrowing through her body, an abyss that is always demanding to be filled.

Her husband doesn't insist. It's not his style. Throughout their courtship and marriage, he's never pressured her to do anything. Everything is always presented to her as a suggestion or a recommendation. It's as if he were constantly practicing being patient for the rowdy kids he teaches at school. Even there, he never loses his temper. Her mother, on the other hand, has been lashing out lately, though afterward she seems unable to remember doing it. She has always been a quiet woman. She is certainly kinder than James's mother, who wouldn't have given Jeanne or Carole the time of day if it weren't for James.

Jeanne often wonders if her mother was happier in Haiti. She doubts it. Jeanne has no right to be sad, her mother has often told her. Only Carole has the right to be sad, because she has seen and heard terrible things. Jeanne's father's approach to life is different. He is more interested than anybody Jeanne knows in the pleasure of joy, or the joy of pleasure, however you want to put it. It's as if he had sworn to enjoy every second of his life—to wear the best clothes he can afford, to eat the best food, to go to dances where his favorite Haitian bands are playing.

Victor drove a city bus for most of Jeanne's childhood, then when he got older he switched to driving a taxicab. Between fares, he sat in the parking lot at Miami International Airport, discussing Haitian politics with his cabdriver friends. Perhaps her mother wouldn't be losing her mind if she'd worked outside their home. Church committees and family were her life's work, a luxury they'd been able to afford because Victor worked double shifts and took extra weekend jobs. Carole could have worked, if she'd wanted to, as a lunch lady in a school cafeteria or as an elder companion or a nanny, like many of her church friends.

Jeanne never wanted to be a housewife like her mother, but here she is now, stuck at home with her son. She doesn't leave the house much anymore, except for her son's doctor's appointments. Most of the time, she's afraid to leave her bed, afraid even to hold her son, for fear that she might drop him or hug him too tightly and smother him. Then the fatigue sets in, an exhaustion so forceful it doesn't even allow her to sleep.

Motherhood is a kind of foggy bubble she can't step out of long enough to wrap her arms around her child. Oddly enough, he's an easy child. He's been sleeping through the night since the day they brought him home. He naps regularly. He isn't colicky or difficult. He is just there.

James decides to offer a toast of his own. He taps his champagne glass with a spoon to catch everyone's attention.

"I want to make a toast to my wife, not only for being a phenomenal wife and mother but for bravely bringing Jude into our lives," he says.

Why does he want to think of her as brave? Perhaps he's thinking of the twenty-six hours of labor that ended in a C-section, during which her son was pulled out with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck. He had nearly died, the doctor told her, because of her stubborn insistence on a natural birth.

The pregnancy had also been easy. She'd worked a regular schedule until the day she went into labor. The pain was intense, pulsating, throbbing, but bearable, even after the twenty-fifth hour. First babies can put you through the wringer, the nurses kept telling her, but the second one will be easier.

She was lucky, blessed, her mother said, that the baby was saved in time. After his toast, her husband kisses her cheek.

"Hear, hear," her brother says in his booming minister's voice.

Jeanne's eyes meet her husband's and she wishes that a new spark would pass between them, something to connect them still, besides their child. She feels like crying, but she does not want to incite one of her mother's rants about her being a spoiled brat who needs to stop sulking and get on with her life. In all the time since her child was born and she realized that his birth would not necessarily make her joyful, and in all the time since she became aware that her mother's mind, as well as her mother's love, was slipping away, today at the church was the first time she has cried.

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A week before Jude was born, Carole went to the Opa Locka Hialeah Flea Market, which Haitians called Ti Mache, and got some eucalyptus leaves and sour

oranges for her daughter's first postpartum bath. She bought her daughter a corset and a few yards of white muslin, which she sewed into a *bando* for Jeanne to wrap around her belly. But because of the C-section neither the bath nor the binding was possible, which was why her daughter's belly did not go back to the way it had been before.

Jeanne became larger, in fact, because she refused to drink the fennel and aniseed infusions that both Carole and Grace brewed for her. And she refused to breastfeed, which would not only have melted her extra fat but would also have made her feel less sad.

When Jeanne and Paul were babies, no other woman was around to help. Carole didn't have the luxury of lying in bed while relatives took care of her and her children. Her husband did the best he could. He went out and got her the leaves and made her the teas. He gave her the baths himself. He helped her retie the *bando* every morning

before he left for work, but during the hours that he was gone she was so lonely and homesick that she kept kissing her babies' faces, as if their cheeks were plots of land in the country she'd left behind.

She couldn't imagine life without her children. She would have felt even more lost and purposeless without them. She wanted them both to have everything they desired. And whenever money was tight, especially after she and Victor bought their house in Miami's Little Haiti, she would clean other people's homes while her children were at school and her husband was at work, something her husband never knew about.

Her secret income made him admire her even more. Every week, before he handed her the allowance for household expenses, he would proudly tell the children, "Your manman sure knows how to stretch a dollar."

Her cleaning money also paid for all the things her daughter believed she'd be a pariah without—brand-name sneakers and clothes, class rings, prom dresses. Her son wasn't interested in anything but books, and only library books at that. He would happily walk around with holes in his cheap shoes.

She should have told her daughter about the sacrifices she'd made. If she had, it would be easier now to tell her that she couldn't stay sad forever. Where would the family be if Carole had stayed sad when she arrived in this country? Sometimes you just have to shake the devil off you, whatever that devil is. Even if you don't feel like living for yourself, you have to start living for your child, for your children.

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Jeanne doesn't realize that her husband and her mother have wandered off with Jude until she finds herself alone with her father.

She hasn't discussed her mother's condition with him for some time. She does not want to tell him or her husband how earlier in the week, when her mother was visiting, she'd forced herself to go out and sit by the pool while her son was napping. As soon as she put her feet in the water, she glanced up and saw her mother watching her from the terrace. Her mother looked bewildered, as though she had no idea where she was.

Jeanne was in the middle of a phone call with James. She ended the call quickly and ran upstairs, and by the time she reached the apartment her mother was standing by

the door. She pushed the door shut, grabbed Jeanne by the shoulders, and slammed her into it. Had Carole been bigger, she might have cracked open Jeanne's head. Jeanne kept saying, "Manman, Manman," like an incantation, until it brought her back.

"What happened?" her mother asked.

Jeanne wanted to call an ambulance, or at least her father, but she was in shock and her mother seemed fine the rest of the day. Jeanne avoided her as much as she could, let her watch a talk show she liked, and made sure that she was not left alone with Jude.

The next day, her mother showed up after James had gone to work and began shouting at her in Creole. "You have to fight the devil," she yelled. "Stop being selfish and living for yourself. Start living for your child."

Those incidents have made Jeanne afraid both of and for her mother. She agreed to go through with the christening in the hope that it might help. Maybe her mother was only pretending to be losing her mind in order to get her way.

Sitting next to James on their living-room sofa, with Jude in her arms, Carole appears calmer than she has all week. Paul is sitting on the other side of her, and the three of them seem to be talking about Jude, or about children in general. Then James's friend Marcos joins them, and Jude reaches out for his big cloud of an Afro.

Jeanne wonders how her brother could fail to notice that their mother is deteriorating. In all their conversations about the christening, he never mentioned Carole's state of mind. Was it because he was used to seeing her as a pious woman, not as his mother but as his "sister" in the Lord? Paul has never paid much attention to practical things. He spent most of their childhood reading books that even the adults they knew had never heard of, obscure novels and anthropological studies, the biographies of famous theologians and saints. Before he officially joined their mother's church, when he was a senior in high school, he had considered becoming a priest. He was always more concerned about the next world than he was about this one.

Her mother motions for Paul to scoot over, then lowers Jude into the space between them on the sofa. Jude turns his face back and forth and keeps looking up at the adults, especially at James.

"How are you these days?" Jeanne's father asks. As he speaks to Jeanne, he's looking at her mother in a way she has never seen before, with neither admiration nor love but alarm, or even distress.

"O.K.," she says. Usually that is enough for him. Her father, like her husband, doesn't usually push. But this time he does.

"Why do all this today?" her father asks, though he already knows the answer. "Did you have this child for her, too? Because she won't be able to take care of him for you. You'll have to do it for yourself."

"Of course I didn't have my son for her," Jeanne says.

"Then why have him?" he asks. "It doesn't seem like you want him."

This, whatever it is that she is feeling, she wants to tell him, isn't about not wanting her son. It's about not being up to the task; the job is too grand, too permanent, even with her husband's help. It's hard to explain to her father or to anyone else, but something that was supposed to kick in, maybe a light that was meant to turn on in her head, never did. Despite her complete physical transformation, at times she feels as though she had not given birth at all. It's not that she doesn't want her son, or wishes he hadn't been born; it's just that she can't believe that he is truly hers.

She's desperate to change the subject. "What's really wrong with Manman?" she asks.

"We're not done talking about you," her father

says. "What's wrong with her?" she insists.

"She's not herself," he says.

"It's more than that."

"What do you want me to say?"

"We need to know the truth."

"We," he says, pointing to her mother, then to himself, "already know the truth."

Jeanne hears her mother laughing, softly at first then louder, at something that either James or Marcos has said. She realizes that possibly there have been doctors, a diagnosis, one that her parents are keeping to themselves.

"What are you saying?" she asks.

"I'll soon have to put her somewhere," he says.

She thinks of the expense and how her mother will not be the only one who is dislocated. Her father may have to sell the house in order to afford a decent place where her mother won't be neglected or abused. She thinks of the irony of her family's not being able to take care of her mother, who has dedicated so much of her life to them.

"I'm not saying it will happen tomorrow, but we'll have to put her somewhere one day."

Jeanne hasn't seen the pain in her father's face before, because she hasn't been looking for it. She hasn't been thinking about other people's pain at all. But now she can see the change in him. His hair is grayer and his voice drags. His eyes are red from lack of sleep, his face weathered with worry.

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arole and her childhood friend Jeanne used to talk to each other through a hole

C they'd poked in the plywood that separated their rooms. In the

Jeanne went to fetch water at the neighborhood tap, she would whistle a wake-up call to Carole. Jeanne's whistle sounded like the squeaky chirping of a pipirit gri, the gray kingbirds that flew around the area until boys knocked them down with slingshots, roasted them in firepits, and ate them.

One morning, Jeanne did not whistle, and Carole never saw her again. The boys in the neighborhood said that her mother had killed her and buried her, then disappeared, but Jeanne's mother had probably just been unable to make the rent and skipped out before daylight.

The next occupant of that room was Victor. Victor's father worked on a ship that often travelled to Miami, and everyone in the neighborhood knew that Victor would be going there, too, one day. His father brought back suitcases full of clothes a couple of times a year, and Victor would always come over with some T-shirts or dresses that his mother said she had no use for, or a plate of food that she claimed would go uneaten if Carole and her mother didn't take it off her hands. Victor soon discovered the hole in the plywood and would slip his finger through and wave it at her. Then she would whistle to him, like the last kingbird of their neighborhood.

Carole knew from the moment she met Victor that he would take care of her. She never thought he'd conspire against her, or even threaten to put her away. But here he is now, plotting against her with a woman she does not know, a fleshy, pretty woman, just the way he once liked them, just the way she was, when he liked her most.

Her husband and this woman are speaking in whispers. What are they talking about? And why is she sitting next to this peppercorn-haired doll that her husband sometimes uses to trick her, pretending it's a real baby. Her real babies are gone. They disappeared with her friend Jeanne, and all she has left is this doll her husband bought her.

She looks around the room to see if anyone else can see what's going on, how this young woman is trying to steal her husband from her right under her nose, while she is stuck on this sofa between strangers and a propped-up baby doll. She grabs the doll by its armpits and raises it to her shoulder. The doll's facial expressions are so real, so lifelike, that its lips curl and its cheeks crumple as though it were actually about to cry. To calm it down, she whistles the pipirit's spirited squeak.

Carole is trying to explain all this to the men on either side of her, but they can't understand her. One of them holds his hands out to her as if he wanted her to return the doll to him.

They are crowding around her now. The fleshy young woman, too, is moving closer. Carole doesn't understand what all the fuss is about. She just wants to take the doll out to the yard, the way she often does when her husband isn't around. She wants to feel the sun-filled breeze on her face and see the midday lustre of the pool. She wants to prove to everyone that not only can she take care of herself but she can take care of this doll, too.

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**H**ow does her mother get past James and Paul and run to the terrace with Jude in her arms? Jude is squirming and wailing, his bare pudgy legs cycling erratically

as her mother dangles him over the terrace railing.

Her father is the first to reach the terrace, followed by James and everyone else. Though Carole is standing on the shady side of the terrace, she is sweating. Her bun has loosened as though Jude, or someone else, had been pulling at it.

Jeanne isn't sure how long her mother's bony arms will be able to support her son, especially since Jude is crying and twisting, all while turning his head toward the faces on the terrace as though he knew how desperate they were to have him back inside.

Paul has rushed downstairs, and Jeanne is now looking down at his face as she tries to figure out where her son might land if her mother drops him. The possibility of his landing in Paul's arms is as slim or as great as his landing in the pool or on the ficus hedge below the terrace.

Marcos also appears down by the pool, as does James's sister, Zoe, adding more hands for a possible rescue. James is on the phone with the police. Grace has Jeanne caged in her arms, as if to keep her from crumbling to the floor. Her father is standing a few feet from her mother, begging, pleading.

Once James is off the phone, he switches places with her father. Jude balls his small fists, reopens them, then aims both his hands at his father. He stops crying for a

moment, as if waiting for James to grab him. When James reaches for him, Carole pushes him farther out. Everyone gasps and, once Grace releases Jeanne, she doubles over, as if she had been sliced in two.

"Manman, please," James says.

"Manman, please," Jeanne echoes, straightening herself up. "*Souple*, Manman. Manman. Please. *Tanpri*, Manman. Manman, please."

Other tenants come out of their apartments. Some are already on their terraces. Others are by the pool with Paul, Zoe, and Marcos. There are now many hands ready to catch Jude should he be dropped or slip from her mother's grasp.

Her son at his last checkup weighed twenty-seven pounds, which is about a fifth of her mother's current weight. Her mother will not be able to hold on to him much longer.

Jeanne walks toward her husband, approaching carefully, brushing past her father, who appears to be in shock.

"Manman, please give me my baby," Jeanne says. She tries to speak in a firm and steady voice, one that will not frighten her son.

Her mother regards her with the dazed look that is now too familiar.

"Let me have him, Carole," Jeanne says. Maybe not being her daughter will give her more authority in her mother's eyes. Her mother may think that Jeanne is someone she has to listen to, someone she must obey.

"Baby," her mother says, and it sounds more like a term of endearment for Jeanne than like the realization that she's holding a small child.

"Yes, Manman," Jeanne says. "It's a baby. My baby." She is trying not to shout over the wails of her child.

"Your baby?" Carole asks, her arms wavering now, as if she were finally feeling Jude's full weight.

"Yes." Jeanne lowers her voice. "He's my child, Manman. Please give him to me."

Jeanne can see in the loosening of her mother's arms that she is returning. But her mother is still not fully back, and, if she returns too suddenly, she may get confused and drop Jude. While her mother's eyes are focussed on her, she signals with a nod for her husband to move in, and, with one synchronized lurch, her father reaches for her mother and her husband grabs their son. Her mother relaxes her grip on Jude only after he is safely back across the railing.

James collapses on the terrace floor, his still crying son pressed tightly against his chest. Jeanne's father takes her mother by the hand and leads her back inside. He sits with her on the sofa and wraps his arms around her as she calmly rests her head on his shoulder.

Two police officers, a black woman and a white man, arrive soon after. They are followed by E.M.T.s. A light is shined in her mother's pupils by one of the E.M.T.s, then her blood pressure is taken. Though her mother seems to have snapped out of her episode and now only looks tired, it's determined that Carole needs psychiatric evaluation. Jude is examined and has only some bruising under his armpits from his grandmother's tight grip.

Jeanne sees the dazed look return to her mother's eyes as she climbs onto the lowered gurney, with some help from Victor and from Paul. Her father asks that her mother not be strapped down, but the head E.M.T. insists that it is procedure and promises not to hurt her.

Jeanne had hoped that her mother was only trying to teach her a lesson, to shock her out of her blues and remind her that she is capable of loving her son, but then she sees her mother's eyes as she is being strapped to the gurney. They are bleary and empty. She seems to be looking at Jeanne but is actually looking past her, at the wall, then at the ceiling.

Carole's body goes limp as the straps are snapped over her wrists and ankles, and it seems as though she were surrendering, letting go completely, giving in to whatever has been ailing her. She seems to know that she'll never be back here, at least not in the way she was before. She seems to know, too, that this moment, unlike a birth, is no new beginning.

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Carole thought she'd never see this again. Yet here they are, her daughter and her son-in-law with their baby boy. James's arms are wrapped around his wife, as she holds their son, who has fallen asleep. Perhaps Jeanne will now realize how indispensable her son is to her, how she can't survive without him. Carole regrets not telling her daughter a few of her stories. Now she will never get to tell them to her grandson, either. She will never play with him again.

The first time her husband took her to the doctor, before all the brain scans and spinal taps, the doctor asked about her family's medical history. He asked whether her parents or her grandparents had suffered from any mental illnesses, Alzheimer's, or dementia.

She had not been able to answer any of his questions, because when he asked she could not remember anything about herself.

"She's not a good historian," the doctor told her husband, which was, according to Victor, the doctor's way of saying that she was incapable of telling her own life story.

She is not a good historian. She never has been. Even when she was well. Now she will never get a chance to be. Her grandson will grow up not knowing her. The single most memorable story that will exist about her and him will be of her dangling him off a terrace, in what some might see as an attempt to kill him. For her, all this will soon evaporate, fade away. But everyone else will remember.

They are about to roll her out of the apartment on the gurney. Although her wrists are strapped down, her son is holding her left hand tightly. Jeanne gives Jude to his other grandmother and walks over to the gurney. She moves her face so close to Carole's that Carole thinks she is going to bite her. But then Jeanne pulls back and it occurs to Carole that she is playing Alo, Bye, another peekaboo game her children used to enjoy. With their faces nearly touching, Jeanne crinkles her nose and whispers, "Alo, Manman," then "Bye, Manman."

It would be appropriate, if only she could make herself believe that this is what her daughter is actually doing. It would be a fitting close to her family life, or at least to her life with children. You are always saying hello to them while preparing them to say goodbye to you. You are always dreading the separations, while cheering them on, to get bigger, smarter, to crawl, babble, walk, speak, to have birthdays that you hope you'll live to see, that you pray they'll live to see. Jeanne will now know what it's like to live

that way, to have a part of yourself walking around unattached to you, and to love that part so much that you sometimes feel as though you were losing your mind.

Her daughter reaches down and takes her right hand, so that both of her children are now holding her scrawny, shaky hands, which seem not to belong to her at all.

“Mèsi, Manman,” her daughter says. “Thank you.”

There is nothing to thank her for. She has only done her job, her duty as a parent. There is no longer any need for hellos or goodbyes, either. Soon there will be nothing left, no past to cling to, no future to hope for, only now. ♦

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