THE BLUEST EYE

by

Lydia Diamond

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THE BLUEST EYE
CAST OF CHARACTERS

CLAUDIA: Precocious, sensitive girl. She must be able to move gracefully between the innocence of youth and the wisdom of the narrator who has lived through it all. Dexterity with direct address a must.

FRIEDA /DARLENE: Claudia’s older sister. Somewhat more practical than Claudia. Possibly more stern, slightly less personable.

PECOLA: A shy, quiet, resigned and somewhat pained presence. She should be completely innocent. So much happens in Pecola’s eyes. We must love her and want to take care of her, but not pity her. Perhaps there is a certain quiet pride that won’t let us tip over into pity. It is imperative that she have very dark brown skin.

MAMA She possesses a large imposing presence. She loves her children and this should be evident despite her stern manner.

MRS. BREEDLOVE: An older version of Pecola, also dark brown. Painfully shy and insecure, and still very adept at addressing the audience.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH: Charismatic, odd, charming, mature.

CHOLLY: Older, physically imposing, dark brown complexion.

MAUREEN PEAL/
WHITE GIRL: Light skinned, very pretty. More complicated than merely “snotty” She is a real person, as complicated as the other characters.

Note; The children are played by adults. Women 1, 2, 3, and 4 can be played by any of the women available…
ACT I
Scene I

Lights rise on Pecola standing, dwarfed in a splash of light. She wears a dingy loose fitting white dress w/ a matching bow in her hair, she holds a large red book. She opens it and reads to audience:

PECOLA

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty.

MRS. BREEDLOVE and CHOLLY enter:

MRS. BREEDLOVE and CHOLLY

Here is the family, Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house.

Frieda and Claudia enter, as cast members enter their voices join the chant:

FRIEDA and CLAUDIA

They are very happy. (Add Maureen) See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? (MAMA) See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? (add CHOLLY) See Father. He is big and strong. (PECOLA, alone) Father will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. (add SOAPHEAD) See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane?

Cast members hum Precious Lord Off Stage.

PECOLA

Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game.

Pecola turns, we see in profile that she is pregnant. V.O. begins again, becoming faster, cast members sing the words to Precious Lord… it crescendos, becomes frenetic.

Lights & Sound out.
Scene II

Lights rise. Claudia stands down right, holding Frieda’s hand. She wears an orange dress much like Pecola’s dingy white. A matching bow in her hair. Frieda’s dress is brown. (Autumn.)

CLAUDIA
Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. Not even the gardens fronting the lake showed marigolds that year. We thought, at the time, it was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the marigolds did not grow. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt, just as Pecola’s father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt.

FRIEDA
The seeds shriveled and died; Pecola’s baby too. (beat) There is really nothing more to say — except why.

CLAUDIA
But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.

Lighting changes.

FRIEDA
Pecola came to us in autumn. Pecola appears, her dingy dress now cinched at the waist by the bow that was in her hair. She carries a large, worn paper bag, and stands in the same spot. She is the embodiment of loneliness and dejection… one dingy sock is up, the other around her ankle… her shoulders are slumped and her head down.

CLAUDIA
In autumn school starts and Frieda and I get new brown stockings and cod liver oil. Daddy spends hours cutting and stacking

DADDY
You need to make sure the wood is stacked perpendicular….

FRIEDA
Perpin…?
That’s up and down, not sideways…

FRIEDA

I knew that. (beat) I did.

CLAUDIA

Daddy goes on and on…

DADDY

What you need to do is make sure the pieces on top slant down so the rain slides off. Not gonna stay warm on damp wood.

CLAUDIA

And on and on…

DADDY

And damp wood makes moldy wood, and moldy wood’s no good, presents a whole ‘nother set of problems. Remember kindling goes in the bucket under the shed.

CLAUDIA & FRIEDA

And on….

DADDY

Kindling has to stay dry. And girls, remember if it’s not smaller than your ring finger, it’s not kindling. What you need to do is make sure the flu’s clean before the first frost… if you wait you got yourself a mess, and……

FRIEDA

Mama has Frieda stuff rags in the window to stave off.

CLAUDIA

and we collect the coal that falls off of the trains onto the railroad tracks.

DADDY

You need to get the medium sized pieces…. Small pieces turn to dust, won’t help us none, you need the medium pieces that fall from the top of the heap. Make sure you keep your eyes up and your ears open, no piece of coal’s worth a flattened girl.

FRIEDA

Staving off the cold is a family project.

CLAUDIA

And I get a cold anyway.

(Claudia sneezes)

MAMA
Great Jesus.

FRIEDA

That’s what she always does in the fall.

CLAUDIA

I get sick and mama fusses.

Light fades on Pecola.
Light in different area rises on Mama, she fusses, partially under Claudia’s words.

MAMA

Get on in that bed. How many times do I have to tell you to wear something on your head? You must be the biggest fool in this town. Frieda?

FRIEDA

Yes Mam?

MAMA

Stuff that window and get the cod-liver oil. Lord, If I ain’t told Claudia once I ain’t told her a thousand times, keep that jacket on when the weather starts to cool. Frieda,

FRIEDA

Yes Mam?

MAMA

Get me the Vicks Salve. (Mama’s words continue under Claudia’s.) I know I don’t work my fingers to the bone so my childrens can be laid up in bed sick. Next thing I know, Claudia done pass it to Frieda then we all sick. Lord have mercy and help us all.

CLAUDIA

I lie in the bed. No one speaks to me or asks how I feel. When I throw up Mama says…

MAMA

What did you puke on the bed clothes for? Frieda…

FRIEDA

Yes Mama?

MAMA

Get me the clean sheet from the line. Don’t you have sense enough to hold your head out of the bed? Now, look what you did. You think I got time for nothing but washing up your puke?

Mama continues to fuss, soundlessly.
CLAUDIA
Mama’s voice drones on. She is not talking to me. She is talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name.

MAMA
Claudia, Claudia, Claudia, lord knows I don’t have time for wiping up after girls without enough since to puke outta the side of the bed….

CLAUDIA
But maybe it wasn’t that bad.

MAMA’s gestures soften.

FRIEDA
Yes ma’am.

MAMA
And some flannel.

FRIEDA
Yes ma’am.

CLAUDIA
Mama’s hands are large and rough. She takes two fingers’ full of the salve at a time and massages it into my chest until I am faint. Just when I think I will tip over into a scream she scoops out a little and puts it in my mouth, telling me to --

MAMA
Swallow.

CLAUDIA
She wraps the flannel around my neck and chest and covers me up with heavy quilts.

MAMA
Now sweat Claudia.

CLAUDIA
--which I do promptly.

FRIEDA
But it wasn’t all bad.
CLAUDIA
Mama meant well. In our household there was love. Love from Mama and Daddy, thick and dark as Alaga syrup. I could smell it – taste it – sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base. It stuck, along with my tongue, to the frosted windowpanes. When the flannel came undone in my sleep and I coughed dry and tough in the night, Daddy stood in the doorway while Mama’s hands repinned the flannel and rested a moment on my forehead.

Mama’s light fades.

CLAUDIA
So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die.

FRIEDA
And Daddy’s strong silhouette looking over us, quiet and serious and concerned.

CLAUDIA
And Pecola

FRIEDA
That’s right. Pecola Breedlove.

Pecola’s light rises again. She looks up, a doe caught in the headlights.

CLAUDIA
Yes. That’s what I was trying to say, isn’t it. That there was enough love in that house to give a little to Pecola, who was sorely in need of someone to care.

ACT I
Scene III

Pecola enters, pulls a primer out of her paper bag, opens it to a marked passage and begins to read.

PECOLA
Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane. They are very happy.

CLAUDIA
Mrs. Breedlove was a peculiar sort.

Light rises on Mrs. Breedlove standing in same spot Claudia and Frieda’s mother stood in earlier. She wears a pristine maid’s uniform.

FRIEDA
All of the Breedloves were peculiar.

Frieda!

CLAUDIA
It’s true. Peculiar and funny looking.

FRIEDA
Come and play. Come play with Jane.

PECOLA

MRS. BREEDLOVE
When I had my girl, I ‘member I said I’d love it no matter what it looked like.

Pecola kneels, clasps her hands in prayer.

CLAUDIA
Actually the Breedloves were not ugly so much as they were just poor and black and believed that they were ugly.

FRIEDA
They were peculiar.

You already said that.

CLAUDIA
Well, they were.
PECOLA
Please, God. Please make me disappear. Please, please, please, please God.

FRIEDA
Peculiar like they lived in a storefront ’stead of a regular house.

CLAUDIA
And Pecola called her mother Mrs. Breedlove.

FREIDA & CLAUDIA
Peculiar.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
I went to the hospital when my time come. Didn’t want to have it at home. They put me in a big room with a whole mess of women. The pains was coming, but not too bad. The doctors come to examine me.

PECOLA
Please, God. Make me invisible…. Please, please, please, please, please, please….

(Pecola’s pleads of “please” are whispered under Mrs. Breedlove’s…)

MRS. BREEDLOVE
One old doctor was learning the young ones about babies. When he got to me he said, now these here women you don’t have any trouble with. They deliver right away with no pain. Just like horses.

CLAUDIA
Pecola’s pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine. I wanted to force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets.

FRIEDA
But she held her misery where it could lap into her eyes.

PECOLA
Amen. (Pecola stands, to audience:) If I squeeze my eyes shut, real tight, little parts of my body go away. I have to do it real slow like, then in a rush. First, off my fingers go, one by one, then my arms disappear, all the way to my elbows. My feet now. Yes that’s right good. My legs go all at once. Above my thighs is the hardest part. I have to be real still and pull and pull and pull… when my stomach goes away the chest and neck follow long pretty easy. The face is hard too. Almost done, almost. But my eyes is always left.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
Only one of the doctor students ever looked at me, looked in my eyes. I looked right back at him. He dropped his eyes and turned red. He knowed, I reckon, that maybe I weren’t no horse foaling.

PECOLA
It don’t matter how hard I try, my eyes is always left. And I try. Every night I pray for God to deliver me blue eyes. I have prayed now going on a year, but I have hope still. I figure God is very busy, and I am very small. To have something wonderful as that happen would have to take a long, long time. Blue eyes like Shirley Temple, or Mary Jane, on the Mary Jane candies. Or Jane in the primer at school.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
I seed them doctors talking to them white women: “How you feel? Gonna have twins?” Nice friendly talk. When them pains got harder I moaned something awful. They wasn’t as bad as I let on, but I had to let them people know having a baby was more than a bowel movement. I hurt just like them white women. Just ‘cause I wasn’t hooping and hollering didn’t mean I wasn’t feeling pain. They think just ‘cause I knowed how to have a baby with no fuss that my behind wasn’t pulling and aching like theirs? Besides, that doctor don’t know what he talking about. He must never seed no mare foal. Who say they can’t have no pain? Just ‘cause she don’t cry? ‘Cause she caint say it, they think it ain’t there? If they look in her eyes and see them eyeballs lolling back, see the sorrowful look, they’d know. (beat) Anyways the baby come.

PECOLA
And people would have to be nice and the teachers would see me, they would really look at me in my eyes and say, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We musn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes. Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. I would be very happy, like Jane, and Shirley and the candy girl.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
She was a big ole healthy baby. All big brown eyes and hair. A right smart baby she was. I used to like to watch her nurse. You know they makes them greedy sounds when they nurse. Eyes all soft and wet, like a cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly, head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly.

PECOLA
They are very happy.

Pecola closes the book.
Lights fade.

ACT I
Scene IV

Claudia and Frieda cross to downstage. The Breedloves stand near them

CLAUDIA
The Breedlove’s ugliness was a unique kind of ugliness.

FRIEDA
No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly.

CLAUDIA
Except for Cholly,

FRIEDA
who’s ugliness had more to do with his behavior…

CLAUDIA
Mrs. Breedlove and Pecola wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them.

FRIEDA
You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source.

CLAUDIA
Then you realized it came from conviction. Their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” It was a truth supported by every billboard, every movie, every glance.

BREEDLOVES
“Yes,"

CLAUDIA
they had said.

BREEDLOVES
“You are right.”

The Breedloves take their places. Mrs. B. in the bed w/ Cholly, Pecola in the other bed.

FRIEDA
And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it.

CLAUDIA
On a Saturday morning in October, not much different from any other Saturday morning in October, they began, one by one, to stir out of their dreams of affluence and vengeance into the anonymous misery of their ugly storefront and ugly lives.

Mrs. Breedlove gets out of bed and walks to the table. She makes a show of slamming plates onto the table.

Cholly, mumbles, thrashes about in the bed for a moment and rolls over. Mrs. Breedlove makes even more noise. Pecola sits up in bed. When the noise fails to wake up Cholly, Mrs. Breedlove goes to the bed.

MRS. BREEDLOVE

I need some more coal.

(Cholly does not respond.)

MRS. BREEDLOVE

I said, I need some more coal.

CHOLLY

Awwwww, woman!

MRS. BREEDLOVE

I need some coal now. It’s cold! You so drunk you wouldn’t feel hellfire, but I’m cold. I got to do a lot of things, but I ain’t got to freeze.

CHOLLY

Leave me alone.

MRS. BREEDLOVE

If working like a mule don’t give me the right to be warm, what am I doing it for? You sure don’t bring in nothing. If it was up to you, we’d all be dead. If you think I’m gone wade out into the cold and get it myself, you’d better think again.

CHOLLY

I don’t much care how you get it.

MRS. BREEDLOVE

You going to get your drunk self out of that bed and get me some coal or not? (silence) Cholly! (silence) Don’t try me this morning man. (silence) All right. All right. But if I sneeze once, just once, God help you!

FRIEDA
They all knew that Mrs. Breedlove could have, would have, and had, gotten coal from the shed. She might even have had Pecola do it.

**CLAUDIA**

This was a ceremonial dance. The orchestra was warming up. They waited in anticipation for the conductor’s baton.

Long moment of silence. Mrs. Breedlove sits at the table and waits. In slow motion she sneezes. The sneeze is amplified and distorted. The affect is ominous and possibly amusing.

A highly choreographed slow-motion fight ensues under Claudia’s monologue. Pecola rocks and covers herself with the blankets. The speed of the “dance” slows in opposition to the animation of Claudia’s words. The dance repeats itself. On her bed, Pecola repeats the same physical process she showed us earlier for “making herself invisible.”

The final image is that of Cholly knocked unconscious, Mrs. Breedlove standing over him.

**CLAUDIA**

Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking. Tactically they had agreed not to kill each other. He fought her the way a coward fights a man – with feet, the palms of his hands, and teeth. She, in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way – with frying pans and pokers, and occasionally a flatiron would sail toward his head. They did not talk, groan, or curse during these beatings. There was only the muted sound of falling things, and flesh on unsurprised flesh.

The fight, perhaps choreographed to a skewed instrumental of Precious Lord, ends several beats after Claudia’s last word.

The music stops. Lighting reverts back to top of scene.

**MRS. BREEDLOVE**

Pecola, now you go get me that coal.

ACT I
Scene V

Pecola enters with brown paper bag.
Frieda and Claudia are playing hopscotch
When she arrives.

PECOLA

Whatchu doin’?

CLAUDIA

Playin’. Want to?

PECOLA

I’ll watch.

FRIEDA

You might as well play. Claudia’s no good competition anyhow.

CLAUDIA

Mama told us you here ‘cause your Mama and Daddy went at it and then your Daddy
burned up your house and now you outdoors.

FRIEDA

Claudia!

CLAUDIA

What? It’s true. (to Pecola) It’s true isn’t it?

PECOLA

I ain’t outdoors, we just stayin’ away for a minute while Mrs. Breedlove do some things
round the house.

Light changes.

CLAUDIA

(to audience)
I knew this was a falsehood. Frieda had heard people talkin’ …

Women One, Two and Three (played by Mama, Mrs. Breedlove, and Maureen) enter
wearing large straw hats. They carry a
basket of clothes (brown) and a line and
clothes pins. They stand, backs to audience,
spread out across stage.
They tie the line up and begin hanging clothes. Each turns to profile when she talks. Frieda and Claudia move around them listening through the exchange.

WOMAN 1
Girl, you heard ‘bout the Breedloves?

FRIEDA
Seem like that’s all people do is talk about other people.

WOMAN 2
Lord, if its not one thing with them people its another.

FRIEDA
Like they know what they sayin.

WOMAN 3
What had happened?

WOMAN 1
Seem Cholly at it again. Went upside that woman’s head, should have knocked her clean out her senses, but she got such a hard head.

WOMAN 2
Heard now they outdoors.

WOMAN 3
Outdoors?

WOMAN 1 & 2
Yes Lord, that’s right, outdoors.

Women pause, mid hanging.

CLAUDIA
(to audience)
Outdoors was the real terror of life. If somebody ate too much, he could end up outdoors.

FRIEDA
If somebody used too much coal, he could end up outdoors.

CLAUDIA
People could gamble themselves outdoors,
FRIEDA

Drink themselves outdoors…

CLAUDIA

Sometimes mothers put their sons outdoors, and when that happened,

FRIEDA

No matter what the son had done,

CLAUDIA

All sympathy was with him.

WOMAN 1

Lord knows if we ever got put out, I would leave town for the embarrassment.

FRIEDA

But understand, there is a difference between being put \textit{out} and being put \textit{outdoors}. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go.

WOMAN 2

Some people jes ain’t got no pride.

WOMAN 3

I told Pete, he ever put me in a position like that, I like to die first.

WOMAN 1

Your Pete, my Avery, ain’t none of them dippin’ into the sauce enough for that to happen.

WOMAN 2

Lord know that’s right.

WOMAN 1

So anyway, ‘county got them split up, placed with families till it all get sorted out.

The women exit.

FRIEDA

So, county placed Pecola with us and she gone stay with us ‘til they can re-unite her family. That’s what they say.

CLAUDIA

Well, whatever “they” had to say about it, we had fun in those days while Pecola was with us. Frieda and I stopped fighting each other and concentrated on helping our guest not feel outdoors.

Fade to previous lighting.

PECOLA
So it’s just ‘til Mrs. Breedlove, Mama, put up some wall paper… She gone stay with the white people she work for.

(uncomfortable pause. Frieda and Claudia jump rope with Pecola, who doesn’t get it. The moment becomes even more awkward.)

FRIEDA
Maybe I could get some graham crackers.

PECOLA
I don’t care.

FRIEDA
I could get some graham crackers and milk. (beat) I have a Shirley Temple cup you can use, but you can’t tell Mama because we supposed to take our snacks inside.

PECOLA
I love Shirley Temple.

CLAUDIA
Why?

PECOLA
I don’t know. She’s pretty and talented and people love her.

CLAUDIA
I don’t.

PECOLA & FRIEDA
Why?

CLAUDIA
I don’t know.

PECOLA
Did you see her in that movie where she danced with Bo Jangles?

CLAUDIA
That’s why I hate her.

FRIEDA
Claudia just mad ‘cause she want to dance with Bo Jangles.

Light changes. Pecola and Frieda continue playing. Game switches to a silent clapping game.
CLAUDIA
So. (To audience) Truth be told, what I felt for Shirley Temple was unsullied hatred. Mr. Jangles wasn’t supposed to be dancing with that white girl. He was my friend, my uncle, my daddy. He should have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. At least with someone who looked like me.

Frieda and Pecola produce dolls and begin playing with them.

CLAUDIA (cont.)
It all started with my annual blonde, blue-eyed Christmas doll. What was I supposed to do with it? Feed it? Rock it? Bathe it? Be its mother? (beat) I’ll tell you what I did with it. I destroyed it. I had only one desire: to dismember it! If I could rip it apart, maybe I’d understand what the world thought was so wonderful about pink skin and yellow hair.

Claudia grabs Pecola’s doll from her. Pecola fawns over Frieda’s doll. They brush her hair, change her clothes, etc. While Claudia uses her doll to demonstrate.

CLAUDIA
I would not, could not love it. I fingered the face, picked the pearly teeth, traced the turned up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs. I’d break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, pull out the hair, twist the head around. The thing made one horrible sound.

PECOLA and FRIEDA
MAA-MA.

CLAUDIA
It sounded to me like the bleat of a dying lamb.

PECOLA and FRIEDA
MAA-MA.

CLAUDIA
I’d remove the cold and stupid eyeball. It would stare at me with one eye and still bleat.

PECOLA and FRIEDA
MAA-MA

CLAUDIA
Take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the floor, it would bleat,

PECOLA and FRIEDA
MAA-MA
CLAUDIA
…still. The gauze back would split, and I could see the disk with six holes, the secret of
the sound. Just a little box with holes, still bleating…

ALL

MAA-MA

CLAUDIA

And mama would say,

MAMA

You don’t know how to take care of nothing. I never had a baby doll in my whole life.
Used to cry my eyes out to have one of my own. Now you got one, a beautiful one, and
you tear it all up? Girl, what’s the matter with you?

CLAUDIA

What was worse,— I wanted to commit a systematic dismembering of real little white
girls to understand what magic it was that they weaved on others. What made people
look at them and say “Awwww,” but not see me at all? Why was I invisible next to little
white girls in pleated skirts and white knee-highs? If I pinched them they actually cried.
Later I learned that my desire to harm white girls was repulsive. I substituted love for the
pangs of guilt I could not bring myself to feel. So, I learned to make a show of “loving”
Shirley Temple. I even convinced myself. But I was years away from understanding the
complexity of my emotions and so was resigned to sit and fume while Frieda and Pecola
played with their dolls on into the night.

Lights fade on Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda. Frieda and Pecola coo over the baby, while
Claudia jumps rope by herself. The sound of the rope creates a rhythm that is picked
up by Mrs. Breedlove’s song.

ACT I
Scene VI
Mrs. Breedlove enters and sings Precious Lord…. It is soulful and beautiful.

**MRS. BREEDLOVE**

_Precious Lord, take my hand_  
_Lead me on, let me stand_  
_I am tired, I am weak, I am worn,_

Mrs. Breedlove continues singing.  
Pecola enters and reads from the Primer.

**PECOLA**  
See Mother.  Mother is very nice.  Mother will you play a game with Jane?

Claudia enters.  Pecola watches.

**MRS. BREEDLOVE**

_Through the storms, through the night_  
_Lead me on to the light_  
_Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me on._

**CLAUDIA**  
When Pecola’s mama, Mrs. Breedlove, was two, she stepped on a rusty nail that went clean through her foot.  From then on she had a kind of flippity floppity limp that distinguished her from others, and also gave her something to pin all her misery on.  That and the front tooth that rotted away and fell out later in life.

**FRIEDA**  
Mrs. Breedlove was fifteen when the war ended, old enough that when her family moved to Kentucky, in search of a better life, she stayed home to take care of her younger brothers and sisters.

**MRS. BREEDLOVE**  
Fantasies about men and love and touching were drawing my mind and hands away from my work.  I would sit in church and dream of a man who would appear out of nowhere.  He would carry in him tenderness, strength and a promise of rest.  I would lay my head on his chest and he would lead me away to the sea, or the city, or the woods forever.

_Precious Lord, take my hand_  
_Lead me on Let me stand…_

**CLAUDIA**  
And then he did come.

Light fades on Pecola & Claudia as Cholly enters, whistling Precious Lord.

**MRS. BREEDLOVE**
He came, strutting out of a Kentucky sun on the hottest day of the year. He came big, he came strong, he came with yellow eyes, flaring nostrils and he came with his own music. *(To Cholly:)* You whistle real pretty.

CHOLLY

Thank you. You real pretty yourself.

MRS. BREEDLOVE

No. *(beat)* I clean up awright I guess. *(pause)* You hungry?

CHOLLY

No ma’am. Just pickin’ some berries for later.

MRS. BREEDLOVE

Me too. Maybe make a pie tonight.

CHOLLY

What happened to your foot?

MRS. BREEDLOVE

Accident.

CHOLLY

I didn’t mean nothin’ by it. Just makin’ conversation. It don’t hurt you do it?

MRS. BREEDLOVE  

*(To Cholly)* It only hurts sometimes when it rains sometime.

CHOLLY

May I?

MRS. BREEDLOVE

And he knelt down on the dusty ground and tickled my foot. Then he kissed my foot, real soft. Then he was kissing my leg. And that’s when I knew Cholly Breedlove was the man I dreamed about in church. That was the moment we first started loving each other I imagine. He treated me real gentle. Made me laugh. Made me his wife and took me North, away from everything I had knowed. I didn’t mind that he sometimes drank too much, ’cause it seem like we was all the time laughing. But I missed my people. Those white folks in the North, seem like they was all over us, and what few colored folks we did see was different too. Diety-like. No better than whites for meanness. That was the lonesomeness time of my life. That put a lot of pressure on Cholly to be my husband **and** my only friend in the world both.

Lights fade and movie screen effect plays  
Across Pauline’s face.

CLAUDIA
Mrs. Breedlove found some comfort and company in the cinema.

FRIEDA

The cinema?

CLAUDIA

Movies stupid.

MRS. BREEDLOVE (cont.)
The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. They’d cut off
the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I’d move right on in
them pictures. Gave me a lot of pleasure. But it made coming home hard, and looking at
Cholly even harder. I started to spend all my housekeeping money on clothes and some nice
things for the house to be more like them happy white people in the pictures. Seem like
Cholly was using all our money to drink more and more, and I steady looking at him like he
nothin’.

CLAUDIA

On one day, not any less or more ugly than any of Mrs. Breedloves days, she went to the
cinema to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow.

MRS. BREEDLOVE

I fixed my hair up like I’d seen hers on a magazine.

Frieda stands behind her, hands her a hand
mirror in which to primp, combing her hair.

FRIEDA

A part on the side, with one little curl on the forehead.

MRS. BREEDLOVE

I thought it looked just like her.

FRIEDA

Well, almost just like.

CLAUDIA

Frieda!

MRS. BREEDLOVE

Anyway I was just sitting there, all in the picture, thinking I looked cute, when I bit down on
a piece of candy and my front tooth comes clean out its socket. I could of cried. There I
was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and my front tooth’s gone.

MRS. BREEDLOVE (cont.)

Didn’t care no more after that. I settled down to being ugly, and goin’ to them pictures just
made me more ugly. Then Cholly started into makin’ fun of the way I looked and that hurt
me somethin’ terrible. So, me and Cholly was fighting even more. I swear I tried to kill him, but he didn’t hit me too hard, I guess ‘cause I was pregnant. He used to make me madder than anything I knowed. I ‘spect I made him mad too, and so that was just what our life looked like from then on.

Blackout.
Light rises on Mama, fussin. In a separate area of the stage, Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia sit.

MAMA
Lord have mercy. Three quarts of milk. That’s what was in that icebox yesterday. Three whole quarts. Now they ain’t none. Not a drop. I don’t mind folks coming in and getting what they want, but three quarts of milk! What the devil does anybody need with three quarts of milk?

CLAUDIA
She talkin’ ‘bout Pecola.

FRIEDA
We knew that Claudia, you didn’t need to say it out loud.

CLAUDIA
Why you drink so much milk Pecola?

PECOLA
I don’t know.

FRIEDA
I do. It’s ‘cause you like using that Shirley Temple cup ain’t it?

PECOLA
Guess so. You think I ought to explain to your mama?

CLAUDIA & FRIEDA
No.

CLAUDIA
It’d just make her more mad.

MAMA
I don’t know what I supposed to be running here. A charity ward I guess. Time for me to get out of the giving line and into the getting line. I guess I ain’t supposed to have nothing. I’m supposed to end up in the poorhouse line. Folks just spend all their time trying to figure out ways to send me to the poorhouse. I got about as much business with another mouth to feed as a cat has with side pockets.

PECOLA
Cats don’t have pockets.

FREIDA
She just talkin’
PECOLA
We gone get in trouble?

FRIEDA & CLAUDIA
No.

CLAUDIA
She just like to blow off steam is all. It don’t mean nothin’.

MAMA
There’s a limit to everything. Don’t nobody need three quarts of milk, Henry Ford don’t need three quarts of milk. That’s just downright sinful. This has got to stop and I’m just the one to stop it. That old trifling Cholly been out of jail two whole days and ain’t been here yet to see if his own child was ‘live or dead. And that mama neither. What kind of something is that?

Long pause. One of the girls examines a scrape under a band-aid, another slaps at a mosquito, while a third makes lazy designs in the dirt with a stick. This goes on for a long while. Finally:

FRIEDA
We better git ‘for she start in ‘bout Roosevelt and the CCC camps and

FRIED, CLAUDIA & MAMA
“all them people who don’t care whether we got a loaf of bread.”

MAMA
Think I’m some kind of Sandy Clause. Well they can just take the stockings down ‘cause it ain’t Christmas.

FRIEDA
Let’s do something.

CLAUDIA
Watchu wan’ do?

FRIEDA
I don’t know. Nothing.

Same long pause as before.

CLAUDIA
Want to go up and look at Daddy’s dirty magazines what he hides under the mattress?

FRIEDA
You know I don’t like to look at them ugly pictures. You like to look at ugly pictures of naked people Pecola?
PECOLA
No, uh uh. That ain’t civ-lized.

CLAUDIA
Well, we could look at the bible? That’s civ-lized.

The girls remain silent. Clearly that’s a bad idea.

CLAUDIA
O.K. then. We could go thread needles for the half-blind lady. She’ll give us a penny.

FRIEDA
Her eyes look like snot. I don’t feel like looking at them.

CLAUDIA
We could go ask Soaphead Church to tell us our futures.

FRIEDA
He a little scary, sides Daddy said to stay away from him.

A light rises on Soaphead, he stands on a small crate, furiously polishing a tea kettle.

CLAUDIA
Truth told, I didn’t want to go over to Soaphead’s house anyway. Sides that Daddy would skin us alive and Mama would fuss for the next three weeks if they found out, he’s spooky and looks at us kind of funny.

FRIEDA
Like too long and too curious.

CLAUDIA
Most adults don’t see you at all unless they need you to do something. Or not do something.

Soaphead pockets the kettle as his light fades.

CLAUDIA (cont.)
(beat) So, I don’t know, you think of what to do for a change?

FRIEDA
Don’t know…

CLAUDIA
Well shoot then. What you want to do Pecola?
PECOLA
I don’t care.

CLAUDIA
We could go up the alley and see what’s in the trash cans.

FRIEDA
Too cold.

CLAUDIA
We could make some fudge.

FRIEDA
You kidding, with Mama in there fussing at the walls, you know she’s gonna be at it all day.

PECOLA
Seem like she wouldn’t let us anyway.

CLAUDIA
Well, let’s go over to the Greek hotel and listen to them cuss.

FRIEDA
They always say the same words. Sides that’s unciv-lized too.

CLAUDIA
(to audience)
It was at this moment that Pecola’s world changed. The moment had only a peripheral effect on us, but Pecola’s world would be forever altered. In that moment she was made more vulnerable than we could even imagine.

PECOLA
Oh my.

FRIEDA
What.

PECOLA
Ohhh, I don’t know what’s happening.

CLAUDIA
You sick?

PECOLA
Maybe so. Must be. (Pecola begins to cry. She stands and where she was siting, and down her legs there is a small, but noticeable amount of blood.)
CLAUDIA

Don’t cry.

FRIEDA

Oh Lordy! I know what that is.

FRIEDA

You ministratin’!

PECOLA

I think I gone die! Will I die?

FRIEDA

Noo. You won’t die. It just means you can have a baby.

What?

CLAUDIA

How you know? Always think you know everything. Like you the authority on ministratin.

Mama told me.

CLAUDIA

Don’t make you queen of ministratin.

FRIEDA

I know what to do. Claudia you go and get some water to wash off the porch with. Pecola, stop crying and give me your drawers.

PECOLA

Take them off?

FRIEDA

It’s the only way.

PECOLA

Whachu gone do with them. They’s the only drawers I got too.

FRIEDA

We’ll bury them and you can have some I don’t wear no more.

Just as Pecola has taken off her panties and
is handing them to Frieda, Mama enters.

MAMA
Ya’ll come in now and get washed up. Got the hot water cornbread on so it’ll only be a minute… Lord have mercy what you all doin’ here. Oh no, Claudia, get me a switch. I won’t have my girls playin’ nasty. I’d rather raise pigs then some nasty girls, least I can slaughter the pigs.

Mama grabs Frieda by the arm and begins Spanking her.

MAMA
I said go get me a switch! What, now you can’t hear? These girls here playin’ nasty and you deaf. Lord help us all.

CLAUDIA
No mama, that ain’t how it is. She was bleeding. We was just tryin’ to stop the blood.

FRIEDA
It’s true mama. She was ministratin, like you told me about. We was just helping.

MAMA
All right, all right. Now stop cryin’. Mama didn’t know. Come now. Git on in the house.

We trooped in. No longer in search of a meaningless distraction to help the day pass.

CLAUDIA
That night as the three of us lay in bed.

FRIEDA
Me in my usual spot on the outside, Pecola in the middle,

CLAUDIA
And I’m against the wall, furthest away from anything that might lurk under the bed and snatch me up. I thought how Pecola was now different from us. Grown-up-like. She probably felt it too, but she did not lord it over us. After a long while she spoke very softly.

PECOLA
It true I can have a baby now?

FRIEDA
Sure you can.

PECOLA
But how?
Somebody has to love you.

PECOLA
Oh. (long pause) How do you do that?

CLAUDIA
What?

PECOLA
How do you get somebody to love you?

CLAUDIA  (to audience)
But Frieda was asleep, and I didn’t know.

(blackout)

ACT II
Scene 1

Set elements reflect Winter.
Frieda and Claudia appear in same
dresses as before, only now they are
blue. (Pecola will always appear in
her dingy white dress.)

Claudia enters.

CLAUDIA
In winter daddy gives us strict instructions about which doors to keep closed or opened
for proper distribution of heat.

DADDY
What you need to do is always keep the kitchen door propped open six inches or so…
more than that you get a cold cross breeze, but you close it and there’s no air to move the
heat from the stove to the back rooms. What you need to do is….

CLAUDIA
He lays kindling by, discusses the qualities of coal, and instructs us on how best to care
for the fire.

DADDY
No baby girl, gently… you want to blow on the cinders, but gently… too hard you’ll just
stir up dirt and smoke, too soft, we’ll lose the flame…

FRIEDA
In winter we put pepper in the feet of our stockings, Vaseline on our faces, and forced
ourselves to swallow breakfasts of slippery lumps of cold oatmeal and cocoa with a roof
of skin.

CLAUDIA
But mostly, we wait for spring when there will be gardens.

FRIEDA
But then, somewhere in the middle of the winter gloom, a distraction.

With great musical fanfare, a bright
white light reveals a light-skinned
“girl” beautifully coiffed and clothed
in the same palette of blues, though
her colors seem brighter, fresher, her
Fabrics more expensive.
All three girls look at her, awestruck.

CLAUDIA & FRIEDA & PECOLA

Maureen Peal.

PECOLA

She’s **beautiful**.

CLAUDIA

She isn’t all that.

FRIEDA

Is too.

CLAUDIA

Fine! (to audience) O.K. (beat) Maureen was beautiful. A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided in two lynch ropes that hung down her back.

PECOLA

I think she’s rich.

CLAUDIA

Rich at least by our standards.

FRIEDA

She was as rich as the richest of the white girls.

CLAUDIA

The quality of her clothes threatened to derange us.

FRIEDA

There was a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes,

PECOLA

Her skin bright and yellow and smooth and soft like churned butter.

CLAUDIA

She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn’t trip her in the halls; white boys didn’t stone her,

FRIEDA

White girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls’ toilet.

PECOLA

She always has lunch money and never eats alone.
FRIEDA
She even likes white milk.

CLAUDIA
Frieda and I were both irritated and fascinated by her. We looked hard for flaws, but the most we could do was ugly up her name.

FRIEDA
Maureen Peal… Meringue Pie. Uh huh. She nothin’ but a big fat piece of nasty Meringue Pie.

CLAUDIA
We were overjoyed to learn that she had been born with six fingers on each hand and that there was a little bump where each extra one had been removed.

FRIEDA
And she had a dog tooth. A cute little thing, but a dog tooth nevertheless.

CLAUDIA
Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie. A small triumph to be sure. Behind the backs of her faithful and adoring public,

FRIEDA
Pecola included,

CLAUDIA
we snickered and called her names. Everything about her made us less. In her presence we became just a little bit dirtier, a little poorer, a bit more invisible, if that was possible even. And then, horror of horrors, she was assigned the locker next to mine.

Claudia moves to another area of the stage.

Hi.

CLAUDIA
Hi.

MAUREEN
Waiting for your sister?

CLAUDIA
Uh huh.
MAUREEN
Which way do you go home?

CLAUDIA
Down Twenty-first Street to Broadway.

MAUREEN
Why don’t you go down Twenty-second Street?

CLAUDIA
Because I live on Twenty-first Street.

MAUREEN
I guess I could walk part of the way that way.

CLAUDIA
Free country.

Frieda & Pecola enter.

CLAUDIA
Maureen is going to walk part way with us.

MAUREEN
She stay at your house?

CLAUDIA
Her mama fixin’ up their place.

MAUREEN
What’s your name?

PECOLA
Pecola.

MAUREEN
My name is Maureen Peal. We just moved here.

CLAUDIA
(to audience)
Of course we knew her name. Everyone knew her name.

MAUREEN
Pecola? Wasn’t that the name of the girl in *Imitation of Life*?
PECOLA

What’s that?

FRIEDA

A movie.

MAUREEN

The picture show, you know. Where this mulatto girl hates her mother ‘cause she’s black and ugly, but then she cries at the funeral. It was real sad. Everybody cries in it.

Oh.

MAUREEN

Anyway, when it comes back I’m going to see it again. My mother has seen it four times.

PECOLA

Mrs. Breed…. My mama say she used to go to the show ‘for I was born.

MAUREEN

My mother told me that a girl where we used to live went to the beauty parlor and asked the lady to fix her hair like Hedy Lamarr’s and the lady said, ‘Yeah, when you grow some hair like Hedy Lamarr’s’.

FRIEDA

Sounds crazy.

MAUREEN

She was. That girl was sixteen and didn’t even start menstruating yet. Do you?

The girls are silent. Pecola raises her hand.

MAUREEN

Me too. I started two months ago. My girlfriend in Toledo started before me and she thought she was dieing.

PECOLA

You know what it’s for?

MAUREEN

For babies. Babies need blood when they are inside of you, and if you are having a baby you don’t menstruate, but when you’re not you don’t need the blood so it comes out.

PECOLA

How do the babies get the blood?
CLAUDIA

Everyone knows that.

FRIEDA

Then how?

CLAUDIA

Tell her Maureen.

MAUREEN

Baby gets blood through the like-line. It’s where your belly button is.’’

PECOLA

Then how come boys have belly buttons, they don’t have babies?

CLAUDIA

(to audience)

Seemed like a good question.

MAUREEN

I don’t know. But I think boys have all sorts of things they don’t need. (pause) Didn’t you ever see a naked a man?

PECOLA

No. Where would I see a naked man. That would be un-civlized.

MAUREEN

I don’t know. I just asked the question.

PECOLA

I wouldn’t even look at a naked man if he stood in front of me. That would be nasty. Who wants to see a naked man? Nobody’s father would be naked in front of his own daughter. Not unless he was dirty too.

MAUREEN

I didn’t say anything about father. I just said a naked man.

PECOLA

Oh, well I thought…

MAUREEN

How come you said ‘father’?

CLAUDIA
Who else would she see, dog tooth? (to audience) I was glad for a real reason to be mad. Truth be told, I was a little jealous that Maureen turned all her sunshine attention on Pecola. Like they were best friends of something.

MAUREEN
I wasn’t talking to you anyway. I don’t care if she sees her father naked all day and all night. Who cares?

FRIEDA
You do because you have a dirty mind.

MAUREEN
Is not.

FRIEDA

MAUREEN
You better be quiet.

FRIEDA
You gone make me?

MAUREEN
You already made. Mammy made.

CLAUDIA
You better not be talkin’ bout our mama.

MAUREEN
You stop talking about my daddy.

FRIEDA
Who said anything about your daddy?

MAUREEN
You did.

CLAUDIA
Well you started it.

MAUREEN
I wasn’t talking to either of you. I was talking to Pecola.
'Bout seeing her daddy naked.

So what if she did see him?

MAUREEN

I never saw my daddy naked. Never.

PECOLA

Did too. All the kids say so. Say you a daddysleepnekked black – ee – mo.

PECOLA

I did not.

MAUREEN

Did. Your own daddy too! I’ve never heard of anything so nasty.

Pecola pulls in on herself. The same stance we saw at the top of play.

CLAUDIA

Stop talking about her daddy.

MAUREEN

What do I care about her old black daddy?

CLAUDIA

Oh no she didn’t.

FRIEDA

Oh yes she did.

CLAUDIA

Who are you calling black?

MAUREEN

You.

CLAUDIA

You think you’re so cute.

Claudia swings, but misses and accidentally hits Pecola. Frieda joins the fray, Pecola
simply stands, near tears. Maureen puts up a good fight and manages to run away.
(Chase takes place through the house.)

MAUREEN
I am cute. And you are ugly. All of you are ugly ugly black e mos. I am cute.

CLAUDIA & FRIEDA

Maureen is gone. Long moment of silence.

PECOLA
She sure is pretty donchu think.

ACT II
Scene II
PECOLA
See Father. He is big and strong. Father will you play with Jane?

CLAUDIA
Before Cholly was Pecola’s daddy, and Mrs. Breedlove’s husband,

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
he was a little a baby what was left by his mama on a junk heap.

CHOLLY
Bout all Aunt Jimmy would tell me ‘bout my Daddy was he didn’t stay round long enough to see mama’s stomach get big with me. (beat) Hard to say how my life with Aunt Jimmy was. Seems like you just take life as it comes when you’re up in the middle of it. I do recollect sometimes when I be watching Aunt Jimmy cross the table, eating collard greens with her fingers or sucking on her gold teeth, I would wonder if it might have been just as well if I had died there on that junk heap. Even so, she was the closest thing I ever had to a mother.

Women cast members enter. They wear black dresses and hats. Their faces covered with black veils. They cross in front of the table and help Cholly into a suit jacket and tie while he speaks.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Jimmy’s funeral was Cholly’s first. The ladies gathered around him, treating him like the child he never was.

CHOLLY
It was spring in my fifteenth year when Aunt Jimmy died.

CHOLLY
I got a new dark suit, white shirt and tie. Hot meals came in baskets covered with cheesecloth. The house was cleaned and a white outfit that looked like a wedding dress was made for Aunt Jimmy to meet Jesus in.

The ladies sew a long piece of lacy white fabric. Sometimes they pull or bite the thread in unison. Sometimes their sewing is sporadic and frantic.

WOMAN 1
What’d she die from?

WOMAN 2
Essie’s pie.
WOMAN 3
Don’t say.

WOMAN 2
Yes Ma’am.

WOMAN 3
You know M’Dear, the medicine woman, told her not to eat anything but pot-liquor ‘til the fever let up.

WOMAN 2
So, Jimmy ate every kind of pot liquor. Think she was almost better.

WOMAN 3
But that pie did her in.

WOMAN 1
Essie must feel mighty bad.

WOMAN 2
Oh, Lord, yes. But I told her, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Wasn’t her fault none.

WOMAN 3
She makes good peach pies. But she bound to believe it was the pie did it, and I ‘spect she right.

WOMAN 2
I spect so.

WOMAN 1
Spect so.

WOMAN 1, 2 & 3
Spect so.

Women stop sewing, needles in air. (beat). Women resume sewing.

WOMAN 3
Did she leave anything?

WOMAN 1
Not even a pocket handkerchief. The house belongs to some white folks in Clarksville.

WOMAN 2
I hear the insurance folks been down talking to her brother.
WOMAN 3
How much do it come to?

WOMAN 1
Eighty-five dollars and something.

WOMAN 3
That all?

WOMAN 1
Can she get in the ground on that?

WOMAN 2
Don’t see how.

WOMAN 1
Seem a shame. She been paying on that insurance all her life.

WOMAN 3
Don’t I know.

WOMAN 2
Um huh.

WOMAN 1
Yes sir.

Pause. The women stop sewing, bite the thread, re-thread needles, and resume sewing.

CLAUDIA
The women chattered far into the night. Their creamy conversation made Cholly lean in, the words filling him with sadness. Still he did not cry.

WOMAN 3
What about the boy? What he gone do?

WOMAN 2
Caint nobody find his mama.

WOMAN 1
Everybody sure liked old Jimmy. Sure will miss her.

WOMAN 2 & 3
Yes sir.
WOMAN 1
She will be missed.

WOMAN 2
That she will.

The women lay the cloth, (Jimmy), on a table. We are now in church.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Still, he did not cry. Instead he sat on the floor in a corner of the room, watching the ladies’ hems and men’s polished work boots dance a social jig he did not entirely understand.

CHOLLY
It did not seem like Aunt Jimmy was really dead. Everything had happened so fast. It was more interesting than sad. When it was my turn to view the body I reached out my hand to touch Aunt Jimmy. But I couldn’t bring myself to. She just looked too private.

Darlene enters.

DARLENE
Hi Cholly.

Hi Darlene.

She look like she sleep.

Yeah, guess she do.

My Grandma died last summer and when I touched her cheek it felt like wax.

Oh.

Yeah. Mama says to be nice to you ‘cause you all alone in the world.

Guess so.

You sad.
CHOLLY

Maybe.

DARLENE

Why ainchu cryin?

CHOLLY

Too old.

DARLENE

If it was my auntie, I’d be cryin’ somethin’ awful.

CHOLLY

That’s ‘cause you a girl.

DARLENE

I am.

(long pause)

DARLENE (cont.)

You want maybe to come with me and pick muscadine?

CHOLLY

Don’t know if they ripe yet.

DARLENE

Won’t matter. Sides, I like it when they kind of tart, just before they ripe. Make your teeth stand on edge.

CLAUDIA

And so it was that young Cholly’s melancholy was replaced for the moment with the promise of something daring and new.

They exit.

ACT II
Scene III
In voice over we hear children playing on a playground. Pecola sits center stage reading.

PECOLA
Who will play. Who will play with Jane. (*Pecola closes the book, speaks to audience*) Sometimes, when I get all the folding and ironing done for Mrs. Breedlove, I go on a candy adventure.

CLAUDIA enters.

CLAUDIA
Seem like a simple enough thing. Only nothin’ simple for Pecola Breedlove.

Pecola enters her own light downstage.

PECOLA
I walk down Garden Avenue. I mostly look at things on the sidewalk and wonder. I wonder why pretty yellow dandelions is called weeds. I like them. They strong and grow fast and don’t hurt no one. When I look hard enough I sometime find a penny. When I have three, I put them in my shoe. This sidewalk a good one for skating. I don’t have skates, but I think because it is old and smooth, the skates would go over it real nice. There’s a crack shaped like a Y that I trip over most of the time. The ants go into that crack and I think they must have a whole world under there that makes some kind of sense to them.

CLAUDIA
Pecola pulls off her shoe, takes out the three pennies and climbs the four wooden steps to the door of Yacobowski’s Fresh Vegetables Meat & Sundries Stoor. (*A bell tinkles when she opens the door.*) Mr. Yacobowski stands behind the counter and looks but doesn’t really see Pecola.

PECOLA
Hello Mr. Yacobowski. (beat) He doesn’t say nothin’ to me. Like he can’t even hear me.

CLAUDIA
It’s a total absence of human recognition, a glazed separateness right behind his eyes. Pecola has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. But this vacuum has an edge. An edge of distaste that lurks in the eyes of all white people. The distaste is for her blackness, because what else could it be, is right there, in his bottom eyelid. Pecola points, leaving a little smudge on the glass counter, utters a timid:

PECOLA
Three Mary Janes please…
Pecola opens her hand to reveal the three pennies.

PECOLA
Mr. Yacobowski don’t want to touch my hand. Finally…

CLAUDIA
The exchange is made.

PECOLA
Three perfect yellow rectangles.

CLAUDIA
The brief predictable moment of humiliation is replaced by the promise of something sweet.

Light fades.

ACT II
Scene IV
Darlene and Cholly enter. Time has elapsed. They are slightly more rumpled, their pails now full of grapes.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
The way to the wild muscadine vineyard was through several backyards, across an open field, and through a dried riverbed. The little green going to purple grapes were too new and tight to have much sugar in them, but Cholly liked to eat them anyway. And on this day, the promise of sweetness that had yet to unfold excited them both more than full ripeness would have.

CLAUDIA
That was years before Cholly made Pecola’s Mama Mrs. Breedlove, that was years before anybody went upside anybody’s head, and anybody was put out of anywhere. That was years before the seeds did not grow. Maybe it’s when it all started to go terribly wrong.

Darlene and Cholly enter from stage right. Time has elapsed. They are slightly more rumpled, their pails now full.

DARLENE
Watchu gone do now?

CHOLLY
Don’t know. Just wander round I guess, maybe look for my Daddy.

DARLENE
You know where he at?.

CHOLLY
Don’t even know who he is. Aunt Jimmy once told me his name. Thought I might look ‘round Macon. Probaly won’t find him. (beat) You want some more grapes?

DARLENE
Naw. We gone need to get back soon. My mama’ll whip me if I come back late. Might whip me anyway ‘cause my dress all messed up.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
The sun had gone. The smell of promised rain, pine and muscadine made Cholly giddy. Turning his head to see where the moon was, Cholly caught sight of Darlene, huddled into a ‘D’.

Darlene struggles w/ the bow that has come undone in her hair.

DARLENE
Yeah, mama gone whup me for sure, I’m all messed up.

CHOLLY
A new emotion caught Cholly off guard.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
His giddiness was replaced with an emptiness. He had finally realized that Aunt Jimmy was dead and the sudden absence of someone to whup him took his breath away.

CHOLLY
You don’t look so bad to me. Let me help.

Cholly rises to his knees, facing her and attempts to help tie her ribbon. A blue wash turns their white clothes to a dark purple. The moment is about to become a kiss. They freeze. A cello plays Precious Lord.

CLAUDIA
They came together as natural and sweet as the night the day had become. It was at once playful and exciting.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
The act itself was not as difficult as Cholly had imagined it would be and felt more like home than anything he had ever known. As his own excitement grew he heard her moans as no more than the pines sighing above his head.

Darlene screams, the light on the two of them goes to black. We seen them in splashes of white light. They react to the men who we do not see.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
He thought he had hurt her until he saw her face staring wildly at something over his shoulder. He jerked around.

CHOLLY
There stood two white men. One with a spirit lamp and one with a flashlight.

DARLENE
No mistaking they were white.

CHOLLY
You could smell it on them. Cholly stands in front of Darlene, staring straight out, attempting to shield his eyes.
The sound of the white men’s voices is muffled and stylized, the words barely audible, the meaning clear.

MAN 1 (in V.O.)
Get on wid it.

CHOLLY
Sir?

MAN 1 (in V.O.)
I said, get on wid it. And make it good. Make it real good. (they laugh)

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
There was no place for Cholly’s eyes to go. He was paralyzed. The white man lifted his gun down from his shoulder. Cholly heard the clop of metal. (sound affect) He dropped back to his knees.

DARLENE
Darlene held onto Cholly and stared out of the lamplight into the darkness, looking almost unconcerned, as though they had no part in the drama taking place around them.

CHOLLY
Her hands clutching his wrist looked like claws.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
With a violence born of total helplessness, Cholly pulled up her dress and lowered his trousers and underwear.

MAN 2 (in V.O.)
That’s right, go on now.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Darlene put her hands over her face as Cholly began to simulate what had before been beautiful and was now something ugly and confusing. He could do no more than make believe. And he hated her for it. Hated her so much he almost wished he could do it.

CHOLLY
He almost wished he could hurt her to make up for the hurt and shame he felt.

MAN 1 (in V.O.)
Hurry it up boy. We got to be goin, don’t have all day.

MAN 2 (in V.O.)
Come on…. They be lookin’ for us.

We hear dogs in the distance, blackout.
All is silence. When the natural light returns Cholly and Darlene are standing, adjusting clothes, not looking at one another.

CHOLLY

We best be getting’ back.

DARLENE

Yes. Best we do.

They exit. Light fades.
ACT II
Scene 5

Lights rise on Pecola.

PECOLA
I take the same sidewalk, past the same crack. Past the same dandelions. Come to think of it, maybe they are weeds. Yes, they are ugly. Ugly weeds. Nobody would think a weed is pretty. You would have to be stupid to think a weed is pretty. (she stomps on the dandelion, crushing it into the ground.) I sit on the edge of the empty playground. I like the playground when it is empty. It is safe and quiet. Before I eat my Mary Janes, I look at each one. Each pretty little girl. Each girl’s name is Mary Jane and she has blonde curls and big blue eyes. And she looks at me with those pretty eyes and she is my friend. She has a treat for me. A peanut butter treat that will last for a long time on my tongue and will be just mine. I eat the candy, and it is almost like I am Mary Jane. Lovely, lovely Mary Jane. Beautiful, happy Mary Jane.

Light fades.
ACT III
Scene 1

MRS. BREEDLOVE

Through the storms, through the night
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me on.

Claudia enters. She and Frieda now are attired for spring. They wear crisp white dresses and shoes and stockings w/ light pastel accents. Claudia sits, cross legged, fingering a long sprig of yellow flowered pussy willow. (Spring)

CLAUDIA
The first twigs are thin, green, and supple. They bend into a complete circle but will not break. Their delicate, showy hopefulness shooting from forsythia and lilac bushes meant only a change in whipping style.

FRIEDA
Mama and Daddy beat us differently in the spring.

CLAUDIA
Instead of the dull pain of a winter strap, there were these new green switches that lost their sting long after the whipping was over.

FRIEDA
Only thing worse than Forsythia switches is Castor Oil.

CLAUDIA
Sunk in the grass of an empty lot on a spring Saturday, I split the stems of milkweed and think about ants and peach pits and death and where the world went when I closed my eyes. I must have sat their for a long time, because the shadow that was in front of the house when I left for my field has disappeared when I go back.

Lights rise on Claudia and Frieda approaching Pecola’s house.

FRIEDA
Whatchu wanna do today?

CLAUDIA
Not sure.
FRIEDA
We could have Soaphead see if we gone get boyfriends…

CLAUDIA
We’d get skinned alive. Ain’t worth it. Why don’t we go cross town and see if Pecola’s at her Mama’s work.

FRIEDA
Why you wan’ go way over there.

CLAUDIA
Somethin’ to do I guess. Truth was, I missed Pecola. Since she had gone back to her house and school was now over, Frieda and I were bouncing off each other and the walls.

FRIEDA
(to audience)
We decided to make the long walk cross town all the way to Lake Shore Park. Lake Shore Park was a glorious city park laid out with rosebuds, fountains, bowling greens, and picnic tables.

CLAUDIA
Black people were not allowed in the park and so it filled our dreams.

FRIEDA
Next to the entrance of the park was the large white house with the wheelbarrow full of flowers where Mrs. Breedlove worked. Pecola sat on a tiny stoop on the side of the house.

PECOLA
Hi.

CLAUDIA & FRIEDA
Hi.

PECOLA
What you all doing here?

CLAUDIA
Looking for you.

PECOLA
Who told you I was here?

FRIEDA
Where else you gone be?
CLAUDIA
You got time to come over to our house?

PECOLA
Mrs. Breedlove don’t like me leaving far from here when I’m supposed to be helping.

Mrs. Breedlove sticks her head out of the door. She’s wearing her uniform.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
What’s going on here? Pecola, who are these children?

PECOLA
Mrs. MacTeer’s girls, ma’am.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
What are you girls doing all the way over here?

CLAUDIA
Just walking.

FRIEDA
Came to see Pecola.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
She gone carry the wash home. Come in and wait while I get it.

The girls enter a kitchen area, where a large pie sits on a table next to a large vase full of yellow flowers.

CLAUDIA
We were led into a massive sparkling white kitchen. Odors of meat, vegetables, and something freshly baked filled the air.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
You all stand stock still right there and don’t mess up nothing ‘til I get back.

Mrs. Breedlove exits.

CLAUDIA
We hadn’t had time to admire the fairy book kitchen properly when another door opened and a little white girl walked in. If her hair wasn’t long and strait and blonde and her eyes blue instead of green, I might have mistaken her for Shirley Temple.

(Perhaps the little white girl could be represented by a white, life-sized doll,
manipulated by the actress who plays Maureen Peal, wearing an identical outfit. The little girl wears pink sundress and pink fluffy bunny bedroom slippers.

GIRL
(afraid)

Where’s Polly?

CLAUDIA
And there was my urge to squash her and perform the same ritual I performed on my white dolls. How could she call Mrs. Breedlove Polly? Mrs. Breedlove who was Mrs. Breedlove even to Pecola. (to girl) She went downstairs to get the wash.

GIRL
(not moving)

Polly. POLLY!

Freida has been inching toward the pie.

FRIEDA
Claudia. Pecola. Look at this.

GIRL
POLLY! Come here!

FRIEDA
This is the prettiest pie I’ve ever seen.

PECOLA
Me too. Mrs. Breedlove don’t make things like this for us.

FRIEDA
I think it’s still hot.

Pecola reaches out her hand to touch the pie as the little girl shrieks…

GIRL
POLLLLYYYY!

Pecola is startled and knocks the pie off of Table, they all freeze.
CLAUDIA
That pie fell to the floor and splattered scalding hot blueberries everywhere. Most of the juice splashed up on Pecola’s legs. Mrs. Breedlove returned faster than I would have thought she could move on that club foot. She was on top of Pecola in a heartbeat.

Mrs. Breedlove slaps Pecola.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
Crazy fool… my floor, messed up. Look at what you did. Oh my floor, my floor…. My floor.

The girl begins to cry. Mrs. Breedlove picks up the doll.

MRS. BREEDLOVE
Oh baby. Hush hush. Hush now. Oh Lord, look at your pretty dress. Don’t cry no more. Polly will change it. We’ll have you in a pretty new dress in no time. (to Pecola) Pick up that wash and get on out of here so I can get this mess cleaned up.

GIRL
Who were they Polly?

MRS. BREEDLOVE
Don’t you worry none baby.

GIRL
You gone make me another pie?

MRS. BREEDLOVE
Of course I will.

GIRL
But who were they?

MRS. BREEDLOVE
They weren’t nobody. Hush now, don’t you worry none.

CLAUDIA
To audience.
The honey in her words complimented the sundown spilling onto the lake and we all felt this as we began the long trek around the perimeter of the park toward home.
ACT III  
Scene II  

A Jazz riff of a very stylized, syncopated version of a hardly recognized “Precious Lord” plays under the following.

Each actor enters while speaking, and stands on a different part of the stage.

CLAUDIA  
The pieces of Cholly’s life could make sense only in the head of a musician.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH  
Only a musician would have the tools to talk their talk through the gold of curved metal, or in the touch of black-and-white rectangles and taut skins and strings echoing from wooden corridors. Only a musician could give true form to Cholly’s painful and confused life. Only they would know how to connect the tar black of a tire on a junk heap, the funky purple of muscadine, to the white of a flashlight on a boy’s naked behind and come up with what all of that meant in joy, in pain, in anger, in love, and give it its final and pervading ache of freedom.

CLAUDIA  
Only a musician would know, without even knowing what Cholly knew. That he was free. Not a good kind of freedom. A freedom tilting into madness born of the kind of loneliness and desperation that answers to no one. This kind of perverted freedom rendered him free to feel whatever he felt—

SOAPHEAD CHURCH  
Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep.

CHOLLY  
Free to take a job, free to leave it.

CLAUDIA  
For who cared if he or his family was fed?

CHOLLY  
Free to go to jail and not feel imprisoned…

CLAUDIA  
For where better was there for him to be.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH  
Free to smile and say to his jailer,
I’m o.k. sir.

For he had already killed three white men.

Free to take a woman’s insults,

For his body had already conquered hers.

Free even to knock her in the head.

For in his disturbed mind that right was his—

because he had already cradled that head in his arms.

He was painfully free to drink himself into silly helplessness,

For he had already been a gandy dancer, done thirty days on a chain gang, and picked a woman’s bullet out of his own calf.

Free to live his own fantasies.

Free even to die.

It was with this freeness that he met, and married and loved Pauline Williams and turned her into Mrs. Breedlove.

When he saw her, leaning on a fence scratching herself with a broken foot,

He fell in love and made her his.
And so it was on a Saturday afternoon that Cholly came home, wrapped in this warped sense of freedom, staggering in the thin light of spring, reeling drunk, that he saw his daughter in the kitchen.

Light comes up on Pecola. She stands w/ her back toward the audience.

Cholly makes his way toward her,

PECOLA
She was washing dishes.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Her small back hunched over the sink.

CHOLLY
Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he saw or what he felt. He became aware that he was uncomfortable; but then, like so many times before his uncomfortableness started to feel like pleasure. Then revulsion. Then guilt. Then pity. Then love.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Maybe not the kind of love found in the warm places, inhabiting the sweet spaces we all know, but the only kind of love Cholly had ever known. A violent, painful, lonely love. His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence.

CHOLLY
She was just a child, why wasn’t she happy. (beat) He wanted to break her neck.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
But tenderly.

CHOLLY
Why did she have to look so whipped? What could he do for her – ever? What could he give to her? What could he say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
The hauntedness would irritate him, the love would make him feel (beat) unworthy. His hatred of her slimed in his stomach and threatened to become vomit.

CHOLLY
But just before the puke moved into his mouth,
PECOLA
She shifted her weight and stood on one foot, scratching the back of her calf with her toe.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
It was a quiet, familiar, and pitiful gesture. The timid, tucked-in look of the scratching toe –

CHOLLY
That was what Pauline was doing the first time he had seen her in Kentucky.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Leaning on that fence staring at nothing in particular.

CHOLLY
The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg.

ALL
It was such a simple gesture.

In the following sequence Cholly joins
Pecola, who’s back is to us the whole time.

The two stand, never touching or moving.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
And once again, the dangerous, ugly, violent freedom. The desperate aching freedom to
claim manhood through the most unspeakable…

CLAUDIA
Unthinkable…

CHOLLY
He sank to his knees, his eyes on Pecola’s foot. Crawling on all fours toward her, he
raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke.

PECOLA
Pecola lost her balance and was about to careen to the floor.

CHOLLY
When Cholly raised his other hand to her hips to save her from falling. He put his head
down and nibbled at the back of her leg. He closed his eyes, letting his fingers dig into
her waist. The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of stunned throat was better
than Pauline’s easy laughter had been.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
The drunken, confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and
forbidden thing excited him.
No matter it was wrong.

For what was wrong to Cholly? Even if he had the power to discern wrong from right, it wouldn’t matter for he lived only in the want of it.

The next thing he knew, or maybe remembered, or maybe it didn’t happen at all...

It happened.

It happened.

It happened.

The next thing he remembered was her soapy hands on his wrists, the tiny fingers clenched tightly, like claws.

He removed himself from her small, dry, wounded body.

She seemed to have fainted.

Cholly stood up. Once again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her.

Cholly lays Pecola’s motionless body down. Covers it with his shirt, and exits.

So when the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor,

Trying to connect the pain with the face of Mrs. Breedlove floating over her.

Pecola sits up. We see her face for the first time as lights fade. Claudia crosses.

So that is the ugly, untidy how of it. The why of it we continue to muddle through.

Blackout.
ACT III
Scene III

It is Summer. Claudia and Frieda’s dresses are grass green.

FRIEDA
We have only to break into the tightness of a strawberry to know that it is summer.

CLAUDIA
Summer remains for me a season of storms. The parched days and sticky nights are undistinguished in my mind. But the storms, the violent sudden storms, both frightened and quenched me. The summer was already thick when Frieda and I received the seeds we had ordered.

FRIEDA
We had waited since April for the magic packets of seeds we would sell for five cents each.

CLAUDIA
The fastest, surest way to a new bicycle.

FRIEDA
We spent a major part of everyday trooping around town selling them.

CLAUDIA
During that summer of seed selling we thought about the money, thought about the seeds, and listened with half an ear to what people were saying. Little by little we began to piece a story together, a secret, terrible, awful story. And it was only after two or three such vaguely overheard conversations that we realized the story was about Pecola.

Four women come out with glasses of lemonade. They wear hats like the black hats worn in the funeral scene. They wear green.

WOMAN 1
Did you hear about that girl?

WOMAN 2
What?

WOMAN 3
Pregnant?

WOMAN 1 & 2
Yesss.
But that’s not all. Guess who?

They all take a sip of lemonade.

Who? I don’t know all these little nappy headed boys runnin’ around here.

That’s just it.

Ain’t no little boy.

They say it’s Cholly.

Cholly?

The girl’s daddy!

Uh huh.

Lord Have mercy.

Nasty fool.

What’s she gonna do? The mama?

Keep on like she been I reckon.

Heard he taken off.

County ain’t gone keep that baby is they?

They all take a sip.
WOMAN 1

Don’t know.

WOMAN 2

None of them Breedloves seem right anyhow.

WOMAN 3

From your mouth to God’s ears.

WOMAN 2

What chu reckon make him do a thing like that.

WOMAN 1

Beats me. Just nasty.

They all take several long gulps, draining their cups.

WOMAN 3

I do think this about the best lemonade I ever had.

WOMAN 2

Yes it is.

WOMAN 1

They ought to take her out of school.

WOMAN 2

Ought to.

WOMAN 3

She carry some of the blame.

WOMAN 1

She ain’t but twelve or so.

WOMAN 2

Yeah, but you never know. How come she didn’t fight him?

WOMAN 3

Maybe she did.

WOMAN 2

Yeah, you never know.
WOMAN 1
Well, it probably won’t live.

WOMAN 2
They say the way her mama beat her, she lucky to be alive herself.

WOMAN 3
She lucky if id don’t stay live.

WOMAN 1
Bound to be the ugliest thing walking.

WOMAN 2
Can’t help but be. Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground.

WOMAN 3
Margaret, you have anymore this lemonade.

WOMAN 1
I could use some ice with it.

WOMAN 2
And that mint complimented it real nice.

They all exit. Claudia and Frieda remain.

CLAUDIA
I thought about that baby that everybody wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was a dark, wet place, its head covered with great O’s of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin. I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live – just to counteract the universal of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Marueen Peals.

FRIEDA
We wanted to do something to change the course of events and alter a human life.

CLAUDIA
What we gone do Frieda?

FRIEDA
Ms. Johnson said it’d be a miracle if it lived.

CLAUDIA
So let’s make it a miracle.
FRIEDA
How we gone do that? We cain’t even make enough money for a bicycle.

CLAUDIA
We could pray.

FRIEDA
That’s not enough. Remember the last time with the bird?

CLAUDIA
That was different, it was half dead when we found it.

FRIEDA
I don’t care. We have to do something.

CLAUDIA
We could ask Him to let Pecola’s baby live and promise to be good for a whole month.

FRIEDA
We better give up something so He’ll know we really mean it this time.

CLAUDIA
We ain’t got nothin’ but two dollars in seed money.

FRIEDA
We could give that. Or know what? We could give up the bicycle. Bury the money and plant the seeds.

CLAUDIA
All the money?

FRIEDA
Claudia, you want to do it or donchu?

CLAUDIA
O.K. I just thought… O.K.

Frieda begins digging. They strike the same pose they had when we met them at the top of the play. Frieda, on her knees, Claudia standing behind her.
FRIEDA
We have to do it right now. We’ll bury the money over by her house so we can’t go back and dig it up, and we’ll plant the seeds here so we can watch over them. And when they come up, we’ll know everything is all right. All right?

CLAUDIA
All right. Only let me sing this time. You say the magic words.

Claudia begins to sing Precious Lord… and Frieda prays under her breath.
ACT III
Scene IV

Pecola enters. Reads from book.

PECOLA
See the dog. Bow wow wow goes the dog. Do you want to play?

She exits.

Soaphead Church enters. He wears an oversized coat and hat. He is very old.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Once there was a man who loved things. He loved things because the slightest contact with people made him sick to his stomach. All his life he had a fondness for things.

Soaphead pulls objects out of the folds of his coat as he talks.

CLAUDIA
A table that had been his mother’s. A welcome mat from the door of the rooming house he once lived in. A quilt from a Salvation Army store counter. The residue of humanity left on the old objects replaced the physical and emotional holes of actually being touched.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
He abhorred flesh on flesh. Body odor, breath odor, the sight of dried matter in the corner of an eye, decayed or missing teeth, ear wax, blackheads, moles, blisters, any kind of the many disgusting natural secretions the human body was capable of disgusted him to the core. His attentions therefore gradually settled on those humans whose bodies were least offensive—children.

Claudia enters. She narrates as Soaphead affectionately sorts and polishes his things. Taking even more things from the folds of his coat.

CLAUDIA
His disdain for people led him into a profession designed to serve them.

CLAUDIA/SOAPHEAD
He became a “Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams.”
It was a good life. He had a steady clientele, a decent income for a man of humble needs. He rented a small apartment from Bertha Reese, a deeply religious old lady who was clean, quiet, and very close to deafness.

CLAUDIA
There was only one problem.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
A very big problem.

CLAUDIA
A big problem for Soaphead anyway.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Bertha Reese’s mangy nasty old dog Bob.

CLAUDIA
The dog was as quiet and deaf as Bertha…

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
But the most nasty, revolting sight you’ve ever seen. He slept most of his days away on the porch in front of the door. His beady eyes ran with a sea-green matter around which gnats and flies clustered.

CLAUDIA
Soaphead prayed for the dog to hurry up and die.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
A humane wish. He could not bear to see a creature suffer so.

CLAUDIA
It did not occur to Soaphead that his “humane” death wish for the dog was actually a reflection of his own suffering.

Soaphead produces a small paper bag.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH
Soaphead decided to put an end to the animal’s misery and bought some poison with which to do it.

CLAUDIA
Only the horror of having to go near the dog prevented Soaphead from completing his mission.
SOAPHEAD
(putting bag in his pocket)
And so he waited for rage or blinding revulsion to give him the courage to do what must be done.

CLAUDIA
And it was in the middle of this wait that a barely pregnant Pecola made her way to Soaphead’s front door.

Enter Pecola. Claudia exits. Soaphead lets her in.

SOAPHEAD
What can I do for you, my child?

PECOLA
It true you help people get they wishes Mr. Church?

SOAPHEAD
Call me Soaphead Church. Everybody else does.

PECOLA
So you can help Mister… (beat) You can help me.

SOAPHEAD
(pulling a card out of his coat, handing it to her)
Says so right here on my card.

PECOLA
Maybe, maybe you can do it for me.

SOAPHEAD
What do you need me to do?

PECOLA
I can’t go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me.

Tell me.

PECOLA
My eyes. (beat) I want them blue. I want them blue so people won’t turn away from me when I walk down the street. So I can go to school. So my stomach stop growing and my baby be strong.

PECOLA (cont.)
I want them blue so my mama love me and I have friends and they think I’m pretty. I want them blue so people don’t do ugly things in front of me and I stop being invisible.

Long Pause. Soaphead is moved. He thinks.

SOAPHEAD

Kneel my child.

Pecola kneels. Soaphead makes a sign of the cross over her.

SOAPHEAD

I work only through the Lord. If He wants your wish granted, he will do it.

Soaphead stops, still in thought. He removes a rosary from his pocket. Looks at it. Discards it. He removes a bible from another pocket. Rifles through it. Discards it as well. Finally he removes the brown paper bag. Only then does the idea occur to him. He reaches into the bag and removes the bottle of poison.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH

We must make some offering, that is, some contact with nature. Perhaps some simple creature might be the vehicle through which He will speak. Let us see.

Soaphead shakes up the poison, blesses it as he has just blessed Pecola and hands it to her.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH

Take this and give it to the creature sleeping on the front porch. Make sure he drinks it all. And mark well how he behaves. If nothing happens, you will know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one.

Pecola takes the bottle. She nods and exits.
Bluest Eye, Adapted by Lydia Diamond  73  
Steppenwolf Commission– 09/15/05

ACT III  
Scene V  

Pecola stands center stage, in her own tight light.

PECOLA  
I walk past Mr. Soaphead’s porch every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday when I helped Mrs. Breedlove with the laundry, so I knewed that dog. I liked that the dog. People say he a ugly dog. I don’t see why… his brown fur a little uneven in some places, even a little pink skin show through, and one of his ears look like it got bit off, maybe by some neighborhood bully dog… but he had soft eyes that would look at you and ask you to love him. I liked to pet him and sometime I even would give him a Mary Jane candy as a special treat. He was happy to see me. He looked up at me and his eyes were softer than I had ever seed them, and he licked the back of my hand like he was grateful just that I saw him… just that I took the time to pat him on his head. He gobbled the meat in the parcel up in one big gulp… and then it all happened quicker than I thought anything could happen. He barked and the bark turned into a cough, then into a horrible whine like a scream almost… then his eyes rolled back up into his head and he started to panting, trying to catch his breath, and scratching at the ground, all the time looking at me like it was my fault… like how could I do that to him. Like I’m his only friend in the world and how could I…. and then he was just quite and he stopped and lay there. Right there at my feet. And everything was quiet. (long pause) And I think… I guess this what Mr. Soaphead mean. And I go to try to find me a mirror.
ACT III
SCENE VI

Soaphead sits at a table. Folds his hands as if in prayer, then removes a piece of pen. He rights the following.

SOAPHEAD CHURCH

Dear God:

The Purpose of this letter is to familiarize you with facts which either have escaped your notice, or which you have chosen to ignore. A little black girl came to me.

Do you know what she came for? She came for Blue eyes. New blue eyes, she said. Like she was buying shoes. “I’d like a pair of new blue eyes.” She must have asked you for them for a very long time, and you haven’t replied. She came to me. Did you forget about the children? Did you? Yes. You forgot.

That’s why I changed the little black girl’s eyes for her, and I didn’t touch her. Not a finger did I lay on her. But I gave her those blue eyes she wanted. Not for pleasure and not for money. I did what You did not, could not, would not do.

I, I have caused a miracle. I gave her the eyes. Cobalt blue. A streak of it right out of your own blue heaven. No one else will see her blue eyes, but she will. And she will live happily every after. I, I have found it meet and right so to do.

With kindest regards, I remain, Your Elihue Micah Whitcomb, aka Soaphead Church.

Soaphead folds the sheets of paper, puts them into an envelope and seals it with sealing. Lights fade.

Light dims on the two of them and rises on Pecola, standing with a mirror.
ACT III
SCENE VII

GIRLS in V.O.

Look. Look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play Jane. Play.

A very pregnant Pecola has a conversation with an imaginary friend. The voice of the friend is her own voice in voice over.

P. VOICE

How many times a minute you gone look at that old thing?

PECOLA

I didn’t look a long time.

P. VOICE

You did too---

PECOLA

So what. I can look if I want to.

P. VOICE

I didn’t say you couldn’t. Just don’t know why you have to look every minute. They aren’t going anywhere.

PECOLA

I know it. I just like to look.

P. VOICE

You scared they might go away?

PECOLA

Of course not. How can they go away.

P. VOICE

The others went away.
PECOLA
Did not. They just changed.

P. VOICE
Go away. Change. What’s the difference?

PECOLA
A lot. Mr. Soaphead Church said they would last forever.

P. Voice
Forever and ever Amen?

PECOLA
Yes, if you want to know.

P. VOICE
You don’t have to be all smarty when you talk to me.

PECOLA
I wasn’t bein’ smarty.

P. VOICE
I’d just like to do something else ‘sides watch you stare at that mirror all day.

PECOLA
You’re just jealous.

P. VOICE
Am not.

PECOLA
You are. You wish you had them.

P. VOICE
Hah. What I look like with blue eyes?

PECOLA
Nothin’ much.

P. VOICE
If you gone keep this up, I may as well go off by myself.

PECOLA
No. Don’t go. Whatchu want to do?
P. VOICE
We could go outside and play I guess.

PECOLA
Too hot.

P. VOICE
Fine! You just take your old mirror, put it in your coat pocket and you can look at
yourself up and down the street.

PECOLA
You are jealous.

P. VOICE
So what, so I am jealous.

PECOLA
Are my eyes really very nice.

P. VOICE
Yes. Very nice.

PECOLA
Just “very nice?”

P. VOICE
Really, truly very nice?

PECOLA
Really, truly, bluely nice? The truly bluest eye?

P. VOICE
Oh God, you’re crazy.

PECOLA
I am not! Say it!

P. VOICE
Fine! Truly bluely nice.

PECOLA
You don’t have to be all mean about it.

P. VOICE
I didn’t mean it mean…
PECOLA
They all try to pretend they don’t see them you know. Can you imagine? Something like that happening to a person and nobody, but nobody saying anything about it.

P. VOICE
They’re probably just jealous too.

PECOLA
You are the only one who tells me how pretty they are.

Yes.

PECOLA
You are a real friend.

P. VOICE
Yes. Yes. I am.

Light fades on Pecola. Claudia steps forward.

CLAUDIA
And so is the how and the edges of the why of it. A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and horror of the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment. A little black girl steps over into madness, a madness which protected her from us, simply because in the end it bored us.

Frieda enters, joins Claudia.

CLAUDIA
I talk about how I did not plant the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn’t matter. It’s too late.

FRIEDA
At least on the edge of our town,

CLAUDIA
Among the garbage and the sunflowers of our town, it’s much, much, much too late.

Lights fade.
End Play.