ZZ PACKER

Doris Is Coming

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Doris Yates stood in the empty sanctuary and wondered if the world would really end in a matter of hours. It was New Year's Eve, 1961, and beyond the pebbled amber church windows the world seemed normal enough; the bushy teaberry and arum pressed their drupes against the windowpanes as if begging to be let in, the speeding Buicks and Fords on Montgomery Road sounded like an ocean. Farther out in the world other Negro youths sneaked out of their homes and schoolrooms to sit stoically at the Woolworth's while whites poured catsup on them. King and Kennedy were transmitted onto the television screens of Stutz's Fine Appliances and Televisions. Whenever she went there, Doris would sit with old Stutz while he smoked and complained: "No news of Lithuania!" he'd say with a disgust one would have expected to settle into resignation since there never was—and never would be—any news about Lithuania. Just as she thought that the world might end that very night, sunlight illumined the windows, clear as shellac, bright as if trying to wake her. She remembered the bottle of furniture oil at her feet and the rag in her hand and began to polish the pulpit.

Cleaning the church was her mother's job, but that day, the day the world would end, it was hers. Her mother cleaned house for the Bermans, the one Jewish family in Hurstbourne Estates. Doris's father picked up her mother just outside the neighborhood because the Bermans' neighbors had complained that the muffler of Edgar Yates's old Hupmobile

made too much noise. This meant Doris's mother Bernice had to walk nearly a mile to meet Doris's father, and was too tired to clean the church besides.

"They sure can cut a penny seventy-two ways," Doris's father would say whenever the Bermans were mentioned. It was his belief that all Jews were frugal to a fault, but Doris's mother would correct him. "It's not the men that's like that, it's the women." Once, when this exchange was playing out, Doris had said, "Can't be all that stingy. It was a Jew man who gave Dr. King all that money." She waited, not knowing whether she would get swatted for talking. Bernice and Edgar Yates were firm believers that their seven children should be seen, not heard. Doris was lucky that time; all her mother did was make a sound not unlike the steamy *psst* of the iron she was wielding and say, "Proves my point. It's not the men, it's the women."

Nevertheless, the furniture polish she stroked onto the pulpit was donated by Mrs. Berman and the rag she held had once been little Danny Berman's shirt. As Doris wiped down the pulpit, she thought of the Jewish boys from up North getting on that bus in Anniston, taking a beating with the rest of the Negro students.[1] She'd seen it all with her family on TV, from the store window of Stutz's. It was important, historic, she felt, but underneath the obvious importance there had been something noble and dangerous about it all. She'd called the NAACP once, to see how old one had to be to join a sit-in, but when she couldn't get through and the operator asked if she'd like to try again, her suspicions were confirmed that all those Movement organizations were monitored. Once she'd even asked Reverend Sykes if she could go to a march, just one, but the answer had been no, that Saints didn't go to marches. Then he quoted the scripture that says, "One cannot be of two masters, serving God and mammon both."

She could hear the main church door open and felt a rush of cold air, the jangle of keys being laid upon wood. The service wouldn't begin for another two hours or so, and she felt cheated that her quiet time was being disturbed. At first she thought it was her mother, then, for a brief

1. As the Freedom Riders were leaving Anniston, Alabama, on May 14, 1961, the bus was firebombed. Several people were injured, one critically.

moment, Reverend Sykes. When Sister Bertha Watkins appeared at the far end of the aisle, she tried to hide her disappointment.

Sister Bertha unbuttoned her coat, inhaling grandly, the way she did before she began her long testimonies. "Well, are you ready?"

"Almost, ma'am. I'm doing the dusting and polishing before sweep and mop."

"No," Sister Bertha smiled. "Not 'Are you finished?' *Are you ready?* For the Rapture?"[2]

According to the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, an organization comprising the Kentucky-Tennessee-Ohio tristate area, the countdown to the end of the world began in 1948. That year marked the founding of Israel as a nation, and the countdown to the arrival of the Second Coming of Christ. A preacher from Tennessee had put the first Rapture at '55, seven years after Israeli nationhood, and when the Rapture had not occurred, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World recalculated, slating the Second Coming for the last day of 1961.

On New Year's Eve, after she'd cleaned the church, Doris took her seat at her usual pew with the other girls her age. Girls who spent much of the service wondering whether Reverend Sykes conked his hair or if it was naturally wavy like that; why he hadn't found a wife yet and which of them would make likely candidates. They passed around notes that got torn up and stuffed into an innocent Bible; they repressed their laughter so that it would sound like a cough.

The service began like most, with testimonies, though tonight there were more people than usual. Doris listened to Brother Dorchester testify that he'd heard birds chirping about the end of the world. Sister Betty Forrester stood and said, "May the Lord take me tonight, because I *sho* don't want to go to work tomorrow!"

When Reverend Sykes rose, everyone gave a great shout, but he sent them a serious look, placing his folded hands on the podium.

"Bear with me, Saints. It's New Year's Eve, and while the world out there jukes around, I want to talk about another holiday. I want to talk about Thanksgiving. Now, y'all may be thinking, 'Why is Reverend Franklin Sykes talking about Thanksgiving? Don't he know he a few months too late? Don't he know he a little behind? Don't he know that our Lord and Christ and Savior Jesus is coming tonight? Don't he know *anything*?' "

2. The Rapture, in some Christian theologies, is defined as the time when the church will be united with Christ at his second coming.

"Yes y' do," a Sister in the back of the church piped up.

Reverend Sykes smiled. He could look thirty or forty or fifty, depending on how he smiled and for whom. "Like I've told y'all before, I'm just a country boy. And in the country when *Daddy* wanted to get some meat on the table by *Christmas*, he knew how to get it. You see, 'fore Thanksgiving came *around*, we'd go out and catch us a turkey. Now you can train a horse to bite on the bit. Train the ox to go the straight *and narrow* way. But Saints! You can*not* train *no turkeys*! Even the chickens will come when you feed them, and in time, lay their eggs in the nest. All the other birds—the *gooses* and the *sparrows* and the *chickadees*—will go *south* when the winter comes. And the Lord shows them the way to go north in the spring."

"Amen," a few women called out. Doris also said, "Amen," though a bit late, wondering where he was heading with it all.

"When the raaaain comes pouring *down*—they won't try to run and hide. No, Saints! They don't heed the Lord's call like the other animals. All the turkey wants to do is follow all the *other* turkeys! They get so *tangled up* in one another, that they will *push* the weak ones on the bottom, but guess what? *All* the turkeys gonna drown! That's right. Don't be a gaggle of turkeys, Saints! Because when the *raaain* comes—!" He walked back to the pulpit and closed his Bible as if that was all he needed to say.

"Preach it, Brother!"

People were up on their feet, shouting, for they now knew the turkeys were all the sinners of the world and the rain was the Rapture that would surely occur that night. They danced and shouted in the aisles like never before. Doris stood as well, looking to see if her mother had arrived, when she spotted a white lady, standing, her hands swaying in time with everyone else's. She definitely wasn't one of the white Pentecostal women who occasionally visited colored churches. This lady had auburn hair, in deep waves that grazed her shoulders like a forties film star's, whereas saved white women were forbidden to cut their waist-length hair, the straggly ends like dripping seaweed. Those women wore ruffles and brooches from the turn of the century, but this lady was dressed in a smart,

expensive-looking suit. Then it hit Doris—the white lady wasn't a lady at all, but a girl. Olivia Berman, Mrs. Berman's daughter. Beside Olivia was Doris's mother, who, despite the commotion, was completely silent. Why was Olivia Berman, a Jewish girl, here?

Everyone else was so caught up that no one noticed that Doris's mother wasn't, but Doris could not concentrate. If Jesus had come at that very second she would have been left behind because she wasn't thinking of Him.

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning and 1962 when they quit their shouting and settled into prayer. Jesus hadn't come, and the children—up past their bedtimes—began to grumble and yawn. When the last hymn had been sung, the last prayer spoken, and the last "Amen" said, Doris found herself outside, buoyed by the night air, scrambling to find the rest of her family. It wasn't hard with a white girl around. The rest of the congregation swirled around them, looking at them but saying nothing. There was no ignoring Olivia: her whiteness, her strangely erect posture, her red hair, the abrupt way she had of tossing her head like a horse resisting a rein.

Outside, everything was extremely as it had been. Jesus had not arrived, but Doris wished He had, if only to keep everyone speculating why Doris and her mother had brought a white girl to church.

"You remember Olivia," her mother said after the service. "She'll be going to Central." Her voice was changed, all the music gone out of it and replaced with the strange, overenunciated syllables she used talking to white folks or imitating them. Bernice Yates usually bade each and every Saint a good night, but that night she looked only at Doris and Olivia.

Before Doris could remember to be polite, she said, "Why are you going to public school? What happened?"

Her mother shot her a look. "Nothing *happened*."

"It's okay, Bernice," Olivia said, lightly touching Doris's mother's shoulder.

Doris cringed. Not even her father called Doris's mother by her first name. Only Mrs. Berman—who paid her mother a paycheck— could call her Bernice.

If Olivia caught the ice in Doris's eyes, she didn't let on. "You see,

Doris, I got kicked out. I'm in need of some saving myself, that's why I came here tonight."

Doris's mother laughed, high and irregular. "Miss Olivia loves to kid around."

"I changed my name, Bernice. Livia. Not O-livia. And I'm not kidding around. I came to find out all about Christian salvation."

Doris watched as her mother looked at Olivia. It was hard to tell whether Olivia was making fun of them. Though Saints were gladdened when anyone became interested in the Holiness Church, this was too much. Jews were Jews, and that was that.

Doris remembered how she'd always thought of how lucky the Jews were: Reverend Sykes had said that whether or not they believed in Jesus, they wouldn't go to hell like other nonbelievers, because they were Chosen. That would mean heaven would be stocked with nobody but Pentecostals and Jews. Doris thought how strange it would be, getting whisked away to heaven only to find things much the way they were when she used to help her mother clean at the Bermans': Mrs. Berman with her pincurls whorled about her head like frosting on a cake, little Al and Danny Berman playing the violin, eyes rolling to the ceiling at Stravinsky's beautiful, boring music. She remembered when Al and Danny quit the scherzo they'd been practicing and started up "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," sawing on their expensive violins as if they were country fiddles. Mr. Berman had let out a primitive yell, thudding something to the ground, the only time Doris had seen him mad.

Olivia Berman offered to drive them home. Doris's mother said that with her daughters Etta Josephine and Doris now there, the car would be too full, and implored Miss Olivia to go ahead home. Doris's mother insisted that no, it was not too far for them to walk. That they'd been doing it for years.

She was the only Negro student in the class, the only Negro in all her classes. And though Mr. Fott, her Honors History teacher, rarely called on her, she was fine with it. She was relieved that he graded fairly, though sometimes he'd comment on her essays with a dark, runic hand: *Do you mean Leo XIII believed the state must remain sub-ord. to the interests of the indiv. composing it? Despite his antipathy of laissez-faire policies?* At

least he didn't speak to her the way Mrs. Prendergast always did, slowly, loudly, as if Doris were deaf.

On the first day Olivia came to Mr. Fott's class, she wore earrings like tiny chandeliers and a pillbox hat, like Jackie Kennedy,[3] though no one wore hats to school. She entered minutes after the bell had rung, and though Mr. Fott made efforts to flag her down, chide her for tardiness, introduce her to the class, she rushed straight to where Doris was seated and cried, "*Doris!*" Doris made no move to get up, but Olivia descended upon her in an embrace, then turned to the class in mock sheepishness, as if she could not help her display of emotion. "Doris and I haven't seen each other in *forever*."

That, of course, was a lie; they'd just seen each other three days ago. But before that night at church, Doris hadn't seen Olivia in years. For the longest time Doris could have sworn she'd heard her mother saying something about Olivia going to a girls' boarding school. But that turned out not to be true: two or three years ago, at supper, when Etta Josephine had asked about her, Doris's mother had said, "You know what? I don't know where they keep that girl? But you know how white folks is. Got family living on the other side of the planet. Hop on one a them airplanes like they going to the corner store." Then she lowered her voice to a gossipy whisper. "But you know what? Now that you mention it, I do believe she's in the sanatorium." Doris hadn't believed it at the time, and had gradually forgotten about her.

"Miss . . ." Fott glanced down at his roll book. " . . . Berman, is it?"

"Why, yes. It is."

"Miss Berman, please be seated. For the record, miss, this class starts on time."

"Who does that Mr. Fott think he is, Doris? I mean, what's his problem?"

Outside school only a few of the yellow buses had pulled into the lot. Doris had been waiting for hers when Olivia—Livia—had spotted her. Livia stared, mutely insistent that Doris answer.

3. The wife of President John F. Kennedy, Jacqueline Kennedy (1929–94) often held sway in matters of style. She was widely known for bringing the pillbox hat into high fashion. Made from felt or straw, the pillbox was dome or egg shaped.

"He thinks he's the teacher, Livia," Doris finally said, "a man to be respected." She hugged her coat tight around her, praying for her bus to pull into its space and save her. She wished her old friend Helen was around so that she wouldn't be such a target for Livia, but now that Helen was in all-colored classes and Doris was in white ones, she rarely saw Helen. "All those white folks make me nervous," Helen had once said when she'd walked Doris to English. It hadn't occurred to Doris to *be* nervous, but now she was more annoyed than nervous; annoyed that this girl would use her mother's first name, annoyed that this girl would come to her church, her school. "Your mother never talks about you," Doris said, suddenly angry. "And where've you been all these years? Where'd you come from anyway?"

Livia took a cigarette from a silver case that looked as thin as a card, then lit it. She inhaled, nostrils dilating, eyes rolling in ecstasy. "I came from walking to and fro upon the earth. And up and down on it." She looked askance at Doris, as if to see whether Doris recognized that she was quoting from the Book of Job: Satan's answer to God's question, *Whence comest thou?*

"Don't use Bible verses that way," Doris said, then added, "and don't talk to me in class." She immediately regretted the words: her mother would slap her if she found out Doris had insulted the daughter of her only employer.

Livia looked at her, surprised. "Don't talk to you? I was doing you a favor. I mean, who *does* talk to you, Doris? Who? Name one person."

"I don't need anyone to talk to. Especially not white people. I talk to my family. I talk to the pastor."

"Reverend Sykes," Livia said thoughtfully, as though it were the title of a poem. She exhaled, and the smoke mazed ghostly around her face, then lifted like a veil above her pillbox hat. "Yes, Reverend Sykes. I don't think Reverend Sykes lets you do the things you want."

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," Doris said. But the retort sounded hollow: she could not help but remember how Reverend Sykes had disapproved of her going to sit-ins, and wondered what Livia knew about Reverend Sykes besides what she'd seen that night at church. And why had Livia come to church at all? Doris de-

cided that she said things purely to shock, said things so that people like Doris's mother could say nothing in return while Livia sat back in smug satisfaction, observing what she'd wrought.

Doris's bus had arrived, and though she tried to think of the worst thing she could say to Livia before parting, all she could manage was, "And I hate your hat."

When she got home it was dark. The boys were running about the house and Etta Josephine had not come back from her job shucking walnuts. But she knew her father must be home; she could hear him hammering away. Her father was trying to build a third bedroom where their back porch had been, but the partition made from blankets never kept out the draft. She turned on the kitchen stove to warm the house and start dinner, wondering why her father had picked winter, of all times, to tear down two major walls of the house. The *pock, pock* sound of nails being hammered into place had somehow grown spooky, as though some force were chipping its way into the house and would eventually take them all whether they invited it in or not.

She dialed the living room radio to its highest volume so she could hear it in the kitchen, over her father's pounding and sawing. She'd finished mixing the meal and egg yolk for the cornbread and had begun frying chicken when the white radio announcer delivered news about the Albany Movement in Georgia;[4] how the colored leaders of that area had petitioned for sewage, paved roads, and a moratorium on the stoning of Negro ministers' houses. It was suspected that the colored citizens of Albany would protest once again if their grievances weren't met, the announcer said. Then the announcer finished on a note of his own that made Doris so mad she forgot to pay attention to what she was doing and burned her hand on the skillet. *When*, he implored, *will the tumult end?*

Doris had excused herself after dinner, saying she needed to gather leaves for her biology-class leaf collection. And though she knew she was headed

4. The Albany Movement, in and out of the news from 1961 until 1965, was formed as an umbrella organization to coordinate the differences in leadership styles between the youthful SNCC, which operated from a grassroots position, and the NAACP and SCLC, which operated by working through the established older black leaders of the community.

to Stutz's, she hadn't exactly told a lie. She *did* need to collect leaves for Mrs. Prendergast's class, though they weren't due until the end of spring.

"Dorrie!" Mr. Stutz said when she entered his store that night. "It's Dori-ka!" He took a break from smoking his cigarette to cough, loud and insistent.

She'd supposed that Dori-ka was some Lithuanian diminutive, but she'd never asked him. She liked that she had another name, in some other language, and didn't want to ruin the mystery of it by finding out what it meant.

"Hello, Mr. Stutz. How's your wife and family?"

Stutz made a face and waved his hand. "Want, want, want. They all want. I tell them, in Lithuania, you are freezing. Here, in America, your brain is frying!"

He laughed at his own joke, though Doris didn't know what was so funny. She didn't always understand him, but she liked his accent. And he seemed lonely. Sometimes, when he stood among his televisions and appliances, he looked like the only person in a graveyard, so she tried to laugh when he laughed.

"Game show is not on, Dorrie. But come. Take chair."

She sat on the stool next to him, and for a while they did not speak. They watched *Marshal Dillon*, Stutz smoking his cigarette peacefully. Then they sat through *The Lloyd Bridges Show*, and when it was over, Stutz said, "Ah. He should not try that show. He was better in *Sea Hunt*."

Doris had not been able to enjoy either of the programs: she could not forget the radio broadcast she'd heard earlier, how the announcer seemed to loathe the colored people of Albany when all they'd wanted was to march for decent sewage disposal without being stoned for it. She thought of what Livia had said about Reverend Sykes not letting her do what she wanted, then looked at Mr. Stutz and announced, "I'm going to go to a sit-in."

He looked at her, puzzled. "Oho! First I am thinking, She is already *sitting*, she is already *in* store." He shook his head then raised a single finger. "You mean like TV."

"Yes," she said. "But they're not just on TV. They do it for real."

"I know that they are *real*," he said, as if she'd insulted his intelligence. "But I think: Good maybe for others. Not so good for Dorrie."

She leapt from the stool on which she'd been sitting. "What do you mean 'not so good'? You think I should just walk around and not care that I have to use a separate everything! That my father shouldn't be able to vote!"

"Dorrie *not yell at Stutz!*"

She sighed her apology, and after a few deep breaths, he seemed to accept it.

"I not say it *baaad*," he said, trying to reconcile. "But Dori-ka is *nice girl—*"

How could Stutz not understand? She was about to object, but he placed a stern hand on her arm to keep her from interrupting him.

"Nice girl. I like Dori-ka. I don't want people to put *Senf* and catsup all over Dori-ka like they do on TV."

Whenever he and Doris had watched news footage of the sit-ins in Greensboro, they'd seen whites as young as the Negro students squirting mustard and catsup all over the protesters.[5] It had amazed her that the students could sit so still, taking it, occasionally wiping themselves off, but never shouting or hitting.

"And Dori-ka," he said, "I am businessman. I think of things from business perspective. If you do what they say called 'integrate,' what will everyone here do?" He waved his hand beyond the window, to where Amos Henry cut meat in his butcher shop, where Mozelle Gordon ran the little store that sold sundries. And there, also in his gesture, was Thomasina Edison, who did everyone's hair, her hot comb heating in its little pod, waiting to do its Saturday-night miracles. "All these business," Stutz said, "all of them Negroid. All," he said, placing his hand on his heart, "but Stutz."

"Now, when someone need hairs cut, they go over *there*. When they need meat cut in half, they go over *there*." He pointed out the window as though outside lay the seven wonders of the world. "When you 'integrate,' I predict, everyone will go to white, none to black. Why? Because white America will build big palace. They will say, 'Why go to Negroid store? Little-bitty tchotchke store? We have everything here!' " Then, with a flourish of his hand, he said, "No more Negroid store. Poof. All gone."

5. As the sit-ins continued, mobs often gathered behind the students to torment them in various ways, such as holding lighted cigarettes to their skin or using condiments as weapons. The more-violent protesters were likely to be in Jackson, Mississippi, or Nashville, Tennessee.

She didn't think that would happen. Couldn't imagine anything like it. But even though Stutz didn't really understand, she felt something like affection for him. When the *Red Skelton Show* theme music began playing, she knew it was time to leave. She stood in front of him, and though both made as if to hug each other, they didn't.

A week later, after Wednesday-night Bible study, Doris decided to ask for a meeting with Reverend Sykes. Her mother would take at least half an hour to make her rounds, hugging and God-blessing everyone in sight, and her brothers could spend all night outside playing stickball in their winter coats.

"Of course, Doris," Reverend Sykes said when she asked to speak with him. "It's been a while since we had one of our talks." He gathered his Bible notes from the pulpit and led her to his office: a hymn-book closet that had been only half cleared of books. He gestured for her to take the seat opposite his and made a little laugh. "Remember when you read some book about digestion, then asked why stomach acid didn't kill Jonah when he was in the belly of the whale?" He smiled, remembering.

It was true. Doris used to want to know why it was fair for David to have Bathsheba's husband killed, just because he wanted to marry her himself; why Jacob got to have Esau's birthright, when Esau's only fault—as far as Doris could see—was that he was hairy.

"This isn't a question," Doris said, "though it involves a Bible story. It's more of a theory."

Reverend Sykes made a mock-impressed face at the word "theory."

"Well, I was thinking about how Jesus turned two fish and five loaves of bread into enough to feed five thousand people, showing how when you feed a physical hunger, folks are more receptive to hearing a message that'll then feed their spiritual hunger."

"Amen," Reverend Sykes said, nodding. "Couldn't a said it better myself. A spiritual hunger that needs to be fed by the Word of God."

"But Reverend Sykes," Doris said, "what if a thousand had to eat their bread and fish in the valley, while the rest got to eat theirs up on the hill? That's what's happening now. We colored have to eat our fish and bread in the valley. The white folks get to eat theirs up on the hill."

He rubbed his eyes with his fingertips. "Well, it seems like you've got a decision to make, Doris. Do you wanna starve, but keep your house with

a hilltop view? Or do you wanna live in the valley with a full belly? Hmm? And what's so wrong with the valley, Doris? The Lord says, 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they toil not, neither do they spin . . .' "

"But Reverend Sykes," she said, voice quavering, "what if the valley is flooded? And why should you have to choose?" She was already near tears, and if she continued in this vein, whatever she said would surely start her crying.

"Doris," he said. He reached across the desk and placed her hands in his, holding them solemnly. "This is about those marches and sit-ins, isn't it? Now I know there's *Dr. King* out there," he said, making the name sound like a fad, "calling himself *preaching*. But do you want to be with all those girls and boys who'd go to jail in a second? Not even caring how much their mamas and daddies have to pay to get 'em out. Do you want that?"

The answer seemed to be no, but it got caught in her throat, like a hummingbird. She finally said, "They're only asking to be treated equal with white folks. Like how God would treat them. That's why the other churches support the sit-ins."

Reverend Sykes let go of her hands and kicked his feet up on the desk. "And these *other* churches. I suppose they're Baptist and A.M.E.? Now, them folks think you can sin on Saturday night and sing hungover with the choir Sunday morning. Did you see that mother of that unsaved family that came in on New Year's? That woman! Coming to church in a red dress, of all things."

Doris hadn't noticed any such woman, she'd been so surprised to see Olivia in the pews. But she looked hard at the Reverend and said, "Yes. I remember. The night the Lord was supposed to come."

"Today," Livia said, "you'll be sick." This was the Tuesday after Doris had spoken with Reverend Sykes. After Mr. Fott's class, Livia took Doris by the crook of her elbow, steering her away from third-period French.

Livia played hooky all the time, and though Doris knew this was what Livia had in mind, knew it was wrong, there was something thrilling about riding in a car with someone besides her parents, going someplace she knew would not be church.

"I can't," Doris said, though she knew she would.

"Alice is already waiting in the car." Alice, another girl in History class, spoke to Livia because speaking to Livia always got you noticed. Alice had begun to dress like Livia, one time even wearing a pillbox hat to class.

Livia drove a turquoise-and-white Mercury Park Lane, a far cry from Doris's father's Hupmobile. They saw *Splendor in the Grass* at the Vogue, Livia sitting in the colored balcony with Doris. Finally Alice came up, too. It was the second movie Doris had seen since her family had joined the church. The first had been a French movie she saw for extra credit, the one time she'd gone against the church's teachings without confessing what she'd done.

They drove from St. Matthews to Germantown, covering the city. When they got to Newburg, Alice let out a long sigh. "I bought my dress for the Winter Dance," she said, turning to Livia. "It's a long satin sheath with roses on either side of the straps. The straps are that minty green color everyone's wearing, but the rest is one long flesh-colored sheath. Mama would die if she saw it, but what's bought is bought."

"Flesh colored?" Doris said.

"I know! Scandalous!"

"You mean, the color of your flesh?" Doris said.

"Well, who else's would it be?" Alice looked to Livia as if searching for a sane opinion.

"You mean *your* flesh color. And Livia's and Mr. Fott's. Not mine."

Alice stared at Doris. "For the love of heaven, it's just a word."

Livia said, "But why use the word if it's not accurate? It's simply not the color of everyone's flesh."

"Well, how should I say it? What should I say when describing it? Say, 'Oh, I bought a dress the color of everybody else's skin except Doris's'?"

"I'm not the only one."

"I could say it was a flesh-colored dress and everyone would know what I was talking about. Everyone would know exactly what I was talking about."

"I'm sure they would, Alice," Livia said. She laughed, high and free. "*Everyone* would."

Alice pinched her fingers together, as though holding a grain of salt. "It's those little things, Doris. Why do your people concentrate on all those little, itty-bitty things?"

Why should she care about what Alice said? That phrase. "Your people." Livia had kicked Alice out of the car right there on Newburg Road, where cabs didn't come and buses were scarce. It was a hard thing to do—kick someone out of a car—and Livia had had to open the passenger side door, drag Alice out against her will, tug and tug until Alice, unwilling to make too much of a scene, finally stayed put on the sidewalk. Her face scrunched up mean and hateful, as if she was too proud to cry, though obviously she wanted to. Livia looked disappointed that Doris wouldn't help kick Alice out, but Doris hopped into the front seat where Alice had sat just the same.

"That's better, now, isn't it," Livia had said, as if she'd done it all for Doris, but Doris didn't speak to her the whole way home. Alice had annoyed her, offended her, but she didn't see any sense in doing anything about it. Acknowledging too much just made it hurt worse. Livia's self-satisfaction and self-righteousness felt just as bad as Alice's thoughtlessness. When Livia drove Doris to the West End part of town where Doris lived, she seemed to delight in seeing so many Negro faces.

During supper, Doris hardly said anything, and no one seemed to notice. Charleroy and Edgar talked excitedly about stickball, about grade-school gossip, about their teacher's bosom until, finally, their mother told them to hush.

It was the family's habit to walk after supper, a leisurely stroll that made them feel wealthy. Once they got to Stutz's Fine Appliances, they'd stop and survey the fifteen or so TVs on display as if they were finicky purchasers looking for the exact one that would suit their needs. In the beginning, Doris's mother would make noises of approval or disapproval of the various models, and her father would crane his neck to examine the side finish and sturdiness of the cabinets. They had all played along when they'd started going to Stutz's so long ago, though they all knew that they didn't have the money and wouldn't for a long time. As far as Doris knew, she had been the only one to actually go inside and talk to the old man.

They stood outside of Stutz's swaddled in coats and watched Lucy and Ethel and Fred beg Ricky to let them on his show. Lucy, ridiculous in a ballerina costume, Ethel in a cha-cha dress, and pudgy Fred in the same dress but wearing a Shirley Temple wig.

Old man Stutz came outside, hobbling. "Hello, friends. Hello, Dorrie."

They looked at Doris, and a chill went through her as if she didn't have a coat on at all. Never before when she and her family visited at night had Stutz been there, only his son, the one he called Lazybones, who never made an effort to go out and greet window shoppers.

"Hello, Mr. Stutz. Mr. Stutz, this is my family." She went through the introductions, and her parents fell silent. The boys pinched each other and tried not to laugh.

"All the answers," Stutz said, wagging and pointing to Doris with a little too much exuberance. "She knows all the answers to all the game shows! You want to buy?" He gestured extravagantly at the television they'd been watching.

Her mother laughed as she had at Livia. Nervous, uncertain. "Well, mister, we'd like to. We're working on it."

"Work on it, work on it!" Stutz said, smiling broadly and bobbing his head.

When they left to walk back home her mother said, "That little Russian man sure is funny-looking."

"Woman, you always got to talk 'bout how someone look," her father said. "Someone nose always too big or too little. Or they teeth missing. Or they breath stank."

"Can't help it if he's funny-looking."

"Lord made him that way. He Russian."

"Rich as he is, he can do something to his face. Keep it from being so funny-looking."

"He's Lithuanian," Doris said, "not Russian."

And little Edgar, popping her on the thigh, said, "Who asked you?"

A few weeks after the car ride and movie, Livia did not show up for class. Doris assumed she was playing hooky, but then two days passed, then three; still no Livia. Finally she went to Livia's homeroom teacher to check whether Livia had been in school at all. She'd been marked present that day, and though Doris looked for her, she couldn't find her. She was not in Fott's class, hadn't stopped by to lean up against Doris's locker and dole out pithy bon mots.

As soon as the last bell rang, Doris searched the front of the school, and when she did not find Livia there, she walked to the student parking lot. There, the white kids stared at her the way department store clerks stared at her family when they went to try on clothes. They stared, then looked away as if they hadn't seen anything at all.

Doris ran toward the gym, remembering how the smokers always hovered near it. Doris was out of breath, but Livia didn't seem to notice or care. She stood there and smiled as though awaiting introductions at a cocktail party.

"Doris," she said.

"Where've you been?" She wanted Livia to say, *To and fro upon the earth and walking up and down on it*. That was always Livia's answer. *Say it*, Doris willed. *Say it*. She'd missed those lines from Job, missed Livia more than she thought she would. *Say it*.

"I've been around," Livia said. She sounded drunk. "Around and around."

"*Around*? What about school? What about—" She caught herself before she could say, *What about me?*

"I hate to say it, Doris, but my time here is limited."

Doris thought death, sickness. Livia going insane like Natalie Wood in *Splendor in the Grass*; she imagined Livia laid up with satin sheets like Greta Garbo in *Camille*, the movie she'd seen for extra credit for French class.

"*No*," Livia said, reading her mind. "Nothing serious. I'm going to school up North. I can't stand it down here anymore. You shouldn't either."

She didn't know what Livia could mean by that: Where would she go? What choice did she have? And had she known things to be any other way? Only rich folks like the Bermans could afford to go wherever they wanted.

"My mother said you were in the sanatorium," Doris said. "Was that where you were before? Is that where you're going?" She checked Livia's face for some crumb of emotion.

Livia smiled brightly, as if Doris never ceased to amaze her, then drew Doris up in a hug. "Oh, Doris," she said. "Don't you know that the real crazy people are the ones who do the same thing over and over again? Expecting a different result every time?"

On the school bus all the Negro kids talked like a party, relieved to be going home. When they spoke to her, it was either a question about Holy Rollers or a question about what whites did in class, how they acted and how they treated her.

"Do they throw things at you?" one boy asked.

"Naw," a girl answered in her stead. "She'd beat 'em up like Joe Louis."

She got off right before Stutz's. None of the televisions were on window display. Without the televisions, the windows were dustier than she'd remembered. It seemed as though someone had stolen them all, but there was no broken glass. She cleared the film of dust off the window and peered in. In the rear of the dark store, televisions sat mutely on the floor like obedient children. Someone was moving around inside. The figure took a large box down from the counter and set it on the floor. He remained hunched over it for a long time, heaving, as if to gather strength for the next one. When the figure finally stood, she saw that it was old man Stutz himself.

She tapped on the window, saw him frown, then, recognizing her, smile with all his wrinkles. He invited her in with a grand sweep of his arm, like a baseball player winding up to pitch. "Come in, come in," he said, though the glass was so thick she could only see him mouthing the words. She threw her hands up. "How? The door is locked?" He frowned. Then, understanding, unlocked the door.

"Mr. Stutz." She started to take off her coat, out of habit, but the store was so cold she kept it on. "How are you?"

He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, folded it in fourths, then eighths, then put it in his pocket. He rubbed his huge eyelids. "Oh, not so good, Dorrie. Moving out. Almost two weeks now, you haven't heard?"

She tried to remember the last time she'd seen him. Perhaps a month ago. "No. I guess I haven't been by in a while."

"This is the problem. You see it? This is the very problem. People

come by. They watch. Laugh at Lucy. Ha ha ha, look at Lucy, love Lucy." He made a crazy face, though whether it was supposed to be Lucy or Ricky, Doris could not tell. Then Stutz's face went from crazy to somber. "The people, they love Lucy, they go home. No one buys. No sales, no money. No money, no Stutz." He threw up his hands like a magician making himself disappear. "No Stutz," he said again. He ambled over to the nearest chair, brought out a second one for Doris. She sat, watching him settle into his. He coughed for a long time, then brought out his handkerchief and pressed it against his lips. "And other things," he said, "but I don't want to offend."

Her skin prickled. "What other things?"

"The neighborhood."

"They're good people."

"Yes," Stutz said sadly, his eyes wise and sclerotic, "Good people." He swept his hand toward the barren store window. "This neighborhood. Good people, yes, but what's-their-name, right here on Fourth Street. Chickens in the yard. Scratch, scratch scratch. Cockadoodledoo. Lithuania in America. And those boys, playing baseball in the middle of the street. Do cars want to stop and buy from Stutz if they will get a crack on their windshield? I don't think so." Stutz shook his head in a slow, ancient way. "Good people. Yes. But."

It was true. Sister Forrester still kept chickens in her yard, and her brothers' friend Juny Monroe got every boy a mile around to play stickball in the street. The games lasted for hours. She could understand how, surrounded by televisions all day, one would be able to see that the rest of the world was different from Fourth Street, prettier, more certain, full of laughter and dresses and men who wore hats not only when they went to church but when they went to work in offices and banks too.

Old Stutz seemed to see something in Doris's eye and said, "Aha! But as they say, there is a silver lining. A smart girl you are, Dorrie. You go learn, come back, make better. You see. I planned it all out for you. Just do."

"It's not that easy."

He waved his hand. "Easy? Easy? I come from Lithuania. I leave my wife and my Lazybones son behind. I work. I send money. They come. Now my wife watches television and points. She wants a fur. Okey, dokey. I say, 'I go to the wood and catch you a fur.' She says, No no no no, and slams all the doors."

She wanted to say, *But you're white*. She wanted to say, *In another generation, your Lazybones son will change his name from "Stutz" to "Stuart" or "Star" and the rest of America will have forgotten where you came from*. But she couldn't say it. He coughed and this time unfolded the handkerchief and spat into it, so instead she said, "And I suppose you had to walk to school, twenty miles, uphill, in the snow."

His face brightened, surprised. "Aha! I see you are familiar with Lithuania!"

She walked from Stutz's and up along Fourth Street. When she got to Claremont, the street where she lived, she kept going, past Walnut and Chestnut and all the other streets named after trees. She hit the little business district, which was still lit for New Year's, the big incandescent bulbs on wires like buds growing from vines, entwining the trees and lighting the shop facades. When she walked farther, she felt, for the first time, some purpose other than solitude motivating her. She rushed, and did not know why, until she found it. Clovee's Five and Dime. As soon as she saw it, she knew what she was doing.

It was warm inside, and she made her way to the soda fountain, even warmer from the grill's heat. A white man stood at the ice cream machine and whirred a shake. Two white men sat at the counter and talked in low, serious tones, occasionally sucking up clots of shake through a straw.

There was one waitress, hip propped against the side of the counter, wiping the countertop with a rag that had seen cleaner days. Without looking up she said, "Sorry. We don't serve colored people."

"Good," Doris said. "I don't eat them." She remembered Helen telling her that this was the line someone had used during a sit-in, and Doris was glad to have a chance to use it.

The waitress frowned, confused, but when she finally got it, she laughed. "Seriously, though," the waitress said, turning solemn, "I can't serve you."

The two men talking looked over at her and shook their heads. They began talking again, occasionally looking over at Doris to see if she'd left.

"What if I stay?"

The waitress looked to the man making the shake, eyes pleading for help. "I don't know. I don't know. I just don't make the rules and I feel sorry for you, but I don't make 'em."

The man walked over with a shake and gave it to the waitress, who bent the straw toward herself and began to drink it. "Look," the man said to Doris, "I wouldn't sit here. I wouldn't do that."

"You wouldn't?"

"I wouldn't if I were you."

She sat. Shaking, she brought out her World History book. She'd made a book cover for it with a paper bag, and she was glad she'd done it because she was sweating so much it would have slipped from her hands otherwise. She set it on the counter, opened it, as if she did this every day at this very shop, and tried to read about the Hapsburgs, but couldn't.

It occurred to her that other students who did sit-ins were all smarter than she; they'd banded together, and had surely told others of their whereabouts, whereas she had foolishly come to Clovee's all by herself. She stared at her book and didn't dare look up, but from the corner of her eye she noticed when the two white men who'd been talking got up and left.

The man at the ice cream machine made himself some coffee and beckoned the waitress to him. When he whispered something to her, she swatted him with the rag, laughing.

Once Doris felt the numbness settle in her, she felt she could do it. She tried at the Hapsburgs again.

The waitress said, "Student? High school?"

"Yes, ma'am. Central."

"My daughter's over at Iroquois."

"We played them last Friday." Doris didn't know what the scores were, didn't care, but had heard about the game over the intercom.

"Well." The waitress started wiping the counter again, going over the same spots.

When Doris closed her book, about to leave, she said, "I just want you to know I'm leaving now. Not because you're making me or because I feel intimidated or anything. I just have to get home now."

The waitress looked at her.

"Next time I'll want some food, all right?"

"We can't do that, but here's half my shake. You can have it. I'm done."

The shake she handed over had a lipstick ring around the straw, and a little spittle. Doris knew she wouldn't drink it, but she took it anyway. "Thanks, ma'am."

Outside Clovee's Five and Dime, the world was cold around her, moving toward dark, but not dark yet, as if the darkness were being adjusted with a volume dial. Whoever was adjusting the dial was doing it slowly, consistently, with infinite patience. She walked back home and knew it would be too late for dinner, and the boys would be screaming and her father wanting his daily beer, and her mother worried sick. She knew that she should hurry, but she couldn't. She had to stop and look. The sky had just turned her favorite shade of barely lit blue, the kind that came to windows when you couldn't get back to sleep but couldn't quite pry yourself awake.