

## From *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

During, before and after the War he had seen Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said anything. Who, like him, had hidden in caves and fought owls for food; who, like him, stole from pigs; who, like him, slept in trees in the day and walked by night; who, like him, had buried themselves in slop and jumped in wells to avoid regulators, raiders, paterollers, veterans, hill men, posses and merrymakers. Once he met a Negro about fourteen years old who lived by himself in the woods and said he couldn't remember living anywhere else. He saw a witless coloredwoman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her own babies.

Move. Walk. Run. Hide. Steal and move on.

## From *Counting Descent* by Clint Smith

### what the ocean said to the black boy

you know how to swim, boy?  
I know you can float;  
felt you bobbing along my surface  
before you even knew you could.  
They say you just a conflagration  
of bad intentions, boy.  
Use me to put you out.  
Don't want you burning this place down

again.

They see  
a little too much L'Ouverture in you,  
a little too much Turner,  
a little too much of what they already had enough of.

What you see when you look at me?  
You know how many of y'all I swallowed?  
You just a drop of ink  
on this canvas,

boy.

They call me blue because  
they don't understand how the sky work.  
They call you black because  
they don't understand how God work.



## what the cicada said to the black boy

i've seen what they make of you  
how they render you a multiplicity  
of mistakes

they have undone me as well  
pulled back my shell and feasted  
on my flesh

claimed it was for their survival  
and they wonder why I only show my face  
every seventeen years

but you

you're lucky if they let you live that long  
i could teach you some things, you know  
have been playing this game since before

you knew what breath was  
this here is prehistoric  
why you think we fly?

why you think we roll in packs?  
you think these swarms are for the fun of it?  
i would tell you that you don't roll deep  
enough

but every time you swarm they shoot  
get you some wings, son  
get you some wings

## what the fire hydrant said to the black boy

we got a tangled history the two of us  
must be hard to look at me  
& just see summertime  
just see childhood  
just see something to keep  
you cool in the heat

they say we both stay posted on corners  
they say we both come with warnings  
for others not to stand too close  
but we both mind our own business  
until people use us for things  
we were never meant for

do you know what it means  
for your existence to be defined  
by someone else's intentions?

a burning home  
a burning cross  
putting a boy against the wall  
so the dogs  
have an easier time

of course you know

a prison cell  
an empty gun  
a mourning mother of a boy who thought  
sending him to that school across town  
would mean he'd  
have an easier time

but when they open us

spilling  
until there's nothing left inside

everyone stands around  
to watch.



## what the window said to the black boy

when someone breaks me they call it a  
crime  
they call it property damage  
they call it breaking the social contract

when someone breaks you they call it  
inevitable  
they call it your fault  
they call it wednesday

they say that it's you who came cracked  
came shattered right out the box  
but they don't know that this is just  
something you do

to show how many of you there are  
that none of you are the same  
that the more shards there are

the more ways there are  
to refract this light  
that envelops us each day

## what the cathedral said to the black boy

come inside child  
rest yourself  
it's okay to want to be held  
ain't we all just trying to be  
some type of sanctuary for someone?  
for every year we are not destroyed  
do they not remind us what a miracle  
it is to have lasted this long?  
amid this plunder  
amid all this wreckage  
take a breath and call it prayer  
take a step and call living  
what that ocean tell you child?  
that they're frightened of you?  
they fear you because they ain't  
ready for your type of holy  
close your eyes  
those stained-glass shadows  
all we got is what we name ourselves  
otherwise I am just a room  
you are just body  
& we know how wrong that is

## Student Models

### *Modeled from Beloved*

During, before, and after high school he had seen others so high or hungover, or tripping, or puking, it was a wonder that he let himself slip this far. They, like him had started slipping in early years, they like him, came from nothing, they like him strung and hung out on needles and candied pills, they like him, losing everything including themselves. They like my brother, lost everything they loved.



## *Modeled from Counting Descent*

### **what the family said to boy**

by Thomas J

you are the fourth to hold your name  
passed down from your father and his father  
and his father before him

you were born of the ocean's glisten but  
moved to the mountain's dew  
you have a big family  
with a big house

and big potential to be anything you wish  
and  
you will grow up knowing that we are here

you've been taught to be tough with a soft  
heart  
but to watch who you let close because they  
can end up hurting that heart  
more than you know

you will learn a lot along your journey  
but don't give into life's temptations  
there will be a day when you leave  
but don't ever be afraid to come back

always work hard  
never grow up too fast

### **what society said to the girl**

By Alyx C.

Face:  
your skin has to be perfect  
tan  
your eyes can't be too wide  
your eyebrows must be the  
right size  
your lips can't be too thin  
but they can't be too thick

you have to wear makeup  
has to be the latest trend  
your teeth, straight and white

Hair:  
has to be perfect  
pretty  
straight  
it's blonde  
spend time on it, make it nice

Body:  
you need to be skinny  
have the perfect proportions  
but have a nice figure  
like big boobs and a big butt

School:  
be smart  
but not too smart  
Or  
people will think you're a nerd  
you must fit in with the popular kids

Clothes:  
you need to have nice clothes  
the expensive ones  
from the popular stores  
dress up nice everyday  
never down

Society:  
if you follow these rules  
everyone will want to be your friend.

And nobody can tell you different.