

Nonfiction

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Black
Lawrence
Press

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What's merciful is not knowing where you are.
—Anthony Hecht

An Incident in the Life of Solomon Northup a Free Man

Spring it was spring was spring in the morning spring

My wife whose skin is summer wheat

had gone

To cook at Sherrill's Coffee House whose skin is wheat had gone

Over to Sandy Hill

My wife Elizabeth my wife Anne and Elizabeth

Our oldest daughter was

It spring in also spring in Sandy Hill

And Margaret and Alonzo with their aunt

At Saratoga I was walking in

The spring in the village of Saratoga Springs

And I loved my children no

Matter how dark their skin

I loved them as

if it were white

my wife whose skin is wheat

My wife whose skin is summer I
Was walking in the spring alone two men approached
Two men approached and introduced themselves they
had been told
They said they had been told
I was an expert player on the violin
They said their names were Merrill Brown
And Abram Hamilton
They said they were associated with a circus had
Some trouble finding music for the circus
Asked me to return with them to the circus
My wife would be away for weeks
Whose skin is wheat and I had been
looking for work
And went with them
And I was drugged and sold in Washington DC
in the spring and only
Played only once
and made they gave me more

Money than I had ever seen before

From any job before

and soon as I saw it I should have known

It wasn't mine

They wouldn't let me keep it and it wasn't mine

Elizabeth whose skin is sun

Behind dark clouds it must be

I remember her skin wrong I

woke up in a box

With no

Windows and I was sitting on a bench chained at my ankles and my wrists

To a large ring in the floor

it must be I remember wrong

Elizabeth wrong but

I could rebuild the chains now and the ring the bench now and the room

From memory

The Visible Boy

1. How He Was Looked

And I had poked my penis through
a hole in the afghan I remember the
How he was looked disgusted he
Looked angry and afraid

And I remember that was when it started that he leaned
Over the back of the couch and put me in his mouth
And I was four or five it felt
Good and I wanted him

To yell at me or hit me and not do it anymore
And I had seen what he was doing
Before but it was women doing it
Before in magazines before

And I tried hard to copy it

The look of the men in the magazines mouths

open eyes closed or eyes open watching but I couldn't

watch I/Tried

and I besides I thought the men who weren't

watching looked happier

2. The Face of Someone

Seeing for someone

In the house for company because

he what he does to my / Body he doesn't

want in the house

he hides the women in / He

hides the magazines in somewhere in / Where guests would never go

for company he what he does to me

He wants to keep private a me a secret even then / And even as a boy
I knew

My body my / Black body wasn't

private wasn't couldn't be

Secret and even then / I knew

He what he did to me made me invisible / I didn't have

the blond face of a kidnapped child I had

the face of someone

Who brought it on himself

3. Was Pretty Was Kids

Was pretty was kids

said I looked / Like Michael Jackson Michael Jackson 1982

And skinny sometimes wouldn't eat for days

Was pretty and he saw it was / Pretty he saw it too

Pretty for boys / To be a boy

Pretty it made him angry talked as if

It made him angry talked / Why

would I want to look like that / And didn't look at me I thought

He didn't like me knew he

didn't like niggers and I was one was half

Niggers and I was one and wasn't also wasn't

old enough to be afraid of him

the way a man / Would

without love

he held me down face down

4. Playboy

Remember stripping in a quarry or it was

A field of white

rocks piled in mounds / Four feet and five feet high

as tall as I was then

But no machinery

remember rode my bike / To the quarry to the field

And laid it down on the rocks / In the middle of the summer on the
warm rocks

thought / I would be beautiful

The way the women in the magazines / Were beautiful

naked on the rocks and stripped / And lay

down on the rocks in the quarry in the field it was

In the middle of my neighborhood

I must have been seven or eight

the rocks were sharp / And swarming with fire ants

I lay there crying out