

## **Salvation**

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Puberty is Robert Johnson standing at the crossroad of Highway 49 and Highway 61, two roads coming and going, one headed for overgrown cotton fields and the despair of dirt roads and one headed for brick towers and paved dreams. The Devil's Hellhounds bark at Bibles being waved by a man in a crumpled paper-bag suit while rocking chairs move back and forth to the whistling wind of change. Mississippi roads are as complex as its politics as dirt roads become gravel roads become paved roads and back to gravel and back to dirt while hotels sit like scarecrows in the middle of cotton fields that refuse to be moved by the train of progress. Often there is one street with two names so that blacks and whites do not live in the same neighborhood; therefore, "cross the tracks" is the line drawn in the sand of civility and salvation.

Christopher swears that once he moves to Jackson permanently he will never go to church again. He has had enough of the Delta and of the fire and brimstone black Baptists to last him a lifetime. Christopher is a pretty good kid until the age of twelve. Then, like most budding blades, he sees the first hair between his legs and loses his mind. All boys go through this; it is just more severe when there's no staminate blueprint available. And matron blueprints for male journeys are like state maps to city travelers. They can point you in an approximate direction, but they don't know any of the avenues to muscularity. No man will ever admit this, but the first time a young boy is able to look his mother in the eye, a sudden thought flowers like an unwanted weed in the soil of his mind: "I think I can take mama." Now, most of them—nearly all of them—will never be outright disrespectful to their mothers. But their reactions to their mothers' demands become slower and slower. This is their rebellion, a statement of maturing independence. The longer it takes for them to act on a mother's demand, the more that delay means, "You can't really make me do anything. The only reason I'm doing

this is because you are my mamma, and I love you. But don't push it, 'cause I'll leave, and you can't stop me." Thus, it takes three or four demands to get the trash carried out or the yard cut.

Strangely, young boys do not wish to be disrespectful to their mothers. They just cannot help it. Daily, to Christopher's ears, his mother's voice begins to sound like a squeaking wheel, grinding against his last protruding and pounding nerve. When she opens her mouth, all he hears are fiberglass fingernails pulled across a chalkboard. And, it is always interrupting him at the most inopportune moments. The Saturday that he plans to sleep in, she wants him to clean the house. The moment he wants to play ball, she asks him about homework. He's like a fish swimming against the current, and his mother is an unnecessary wave, pushing him backward. So, like any smart fish, he dives deeper beneath her radar, waiting until she leaves to sneak to the arcade, or hiding magazines inside his schoolbooks, or sweeping dirt under the sofa and rug. When boys commit these acts of rebellion, it is as if they are standing outside themselves watching themselves on somebody else's television. Puberty is a tornado, and Christopher is a trailer park. It is that driving desire to be a man. It is like being given the keys to your favorite car, but you do not know how to drive. Instructions or not, nature will take its course, which means the engine will start whether or not he's been to driving school. Parents can only hope to have done a good job of instilling in their children proper values and a clear road map. For the one eye of puberty is blind to values. Puberty is like the twilight zone for teenagers. It has its own rules about outgrowing childhood, and mind over matter is a thrown-away falsehood. Being a man is a philosophy. Being a male is a fact of biology. It is the most awkward time of life, where he is trying to complete a Rubik's Cube in the dark. Both the mind and the body are expanding, looking for an identity, looking for new roads to navigate. Parents fight to keep down the glass ceiling and monitor the speed limit.

One can only pray that the ceiling does not explode and cut anybody or that the car doesn't mishandle a steep curve.

In puberty, Christopher is a wild flower. With divorced parents, his petals reach in all directions, easily mingling and getting entangled with uncultivated weeds. Ironically, Christopher likes having divorced parents. It means two of everything—two Christmas celebrations, two Thanksgivings, two birthdays. It also means less stability. Christopher's first wet dream comes with a large side order of embarrassment, instead of a heaping helping of understanding. Like blood to sharks, the other kids know that this instability is an issue for Christopher. It is a trump card that they hold, ready and waiting to use during this Darwinian growth spurt. The Dozens, for instance, is another rite of passage during male gestation. Christopher has the quickest wit, but the other kids are always able to get him to break down by "snapping" on his absentee daddy. Right in the middle of Christopher's good roll, one of the kids will interject, "At least I know where my daddy is. Yo' daddy been gone so long they had him on America's most wanted." To this, Christopher replies, "Shut up. I do know where my daddy at. He in Jackson." "Jackson?!?" one of the kids—maybe Bighead Bernard—responds, "Man that's a whole city. Can't you narrow that shit down to maybe a voting precinct?" The kids gleefully explode with laughter. Another kid—probably Skillet—chimes in, "Yeah, can you get us to a neighborhood instead of a congressional district?" By now the kids are doubled over and lying on the ground, eyes drowned with tears and throats and bellies filled with laughter. Christopher's usually swift tongue slows to a snails pace, filling his mouth like it's two sizes too large. The embarrassment of being the only one on the street whose father does not live there, reaches up and strangles his words, momentarily separating his brain from his voice box like an emotional tollbooth. The scalpel of the joke is not that Christopher doesn't know where his father is. The sharpness of the quip's dagger lies in the reality that he is the bastard

oddball of the tribe. It cuts deep, rendering his larynx silent. We all have one thing that suffocates us. The “Daddy” joke is Christopher’s plastic bag. So, Christopher, with no verbal retort availing itself to him, options for a physical course of action. He punches the closest kid to him, and the rest of the kids respond by taking turns making a ghetto piñata of him. This scenario repeats itself throughout the school year and twice during summer days. Because of this, he spends a good bit of time between Jackson and Clarksdale, his mother hoping that it will save him some beatings and her from having to buy new school clothes.

Having to go to Jackson every summer and holiday break gives him a clear understanding of the differences of life in the Delta and life in Jackson. In Jackson, church, though still mandatory, is not the central focus of most people’s lives. Neither his father nor his father’s friends attend church regularly. In the Delta, Christopher does not know any grown folks who do not attend church—except for the heathens who attend the juke joint, but they are all going to hell. Of course, no one ever talks about the piano player who is able to pull double duty—Saturday night in the cafe’ and Sunday morning in the church. It seems that everyone else, except for the piano player, has a reservation for condemnation. However, Christopher believes that their hell of a good time is worth eternal damnation. The biggest difference is the overwhelming amount of activities to do in Jackson in comparison to Clarksdale. During the summers spent in Jackson, there is very little down time. Jackson has malls, several movie complexes, semi-pro ball teams, clubs, museums, cultural festivities, and the many events that take place at Onyx State University. To a kid coming from a community of twenty-two thousand, this is a mecca. Clarksdale has high school sports, church, and television. There is still the green bus that comes during the summer mornings to pick up kids who want to chop some cotton to earn some money. This bus and this summer activity creates a different type of young man than

the one who spends his summers at the mall and at the park.

Even names seem to be different. They seem to reflect the differing attitudes and philosophies of the people. In Clarksdale, Christopher's best friend's name is Robert. Robert's mother's name is Roberta, and his father's name is Robert. Robert's mother is a twin. His uncle's name is Robert. What are the odds that she would fall in love and marry a man named Robert who is named for his uncle, Robert? There is no doubt what Robert Jr.'s name would be, but Christopher is never able to understand why the other seven brothers and sisters are named Robert as well. All eight children are named Robert. They are all given the same first name and different middle names. Robert Earl, Jr., Robert David, Robert Willie, Roberta Robert, Robert Kelly, Robert Hughes, Robert Donnell, and Robert Franklin. What is even stranger is the manner in which the mother addresses them. She calls them all Robert. Yet, each one knows when she is referring to a specific one. The kids claim that they know who she is calling by the tone and inflection in her voice—that she can say Robert nine different ways—ten, if you count the one she has for calling all of them at once. Christopher just shakes his head and blames it on the Delta sun, always thinking, “I gotta leave this place before I either understand or believe this shit, or, worse than that, before my name becomes Robert.” In Jackson, the names seem to be a bit more progressive. Christopher has an Aunt who is married to this real Africentric, militant brother. Everything that he does, says, wears, and eats identifies with The Movement. When they conceived their first child, he wanted the name to reflect his philosophy. When Christopher's Aunt was in labor, she was unable to bear the pain. Due to the amount of medicine and other complications, she was unconscious when it was time to name the baby. His uncle seized this moment to name the child “Twenty-Four Karat Black Gold Jackson.” Needless to say, when his aunt awoke, she hit the ceiling. Once they were able to calm her down and

remove her hands from around his uncle's throat, they finally settled on "Ebony Gold Jackson." Once hearing about the story, Christopher continues to call his cousin "Black Gold," partly cause he thinks it's a cool story and partly because his uncle's attitude goes against everything that most of the church folks preach.

The kids are even different. Christopher always blames it on the over abundance of church duty in the Delta. Christopher especially hates a kid named Tony Coleman. Every time Christopher does something wrong, his mother mentions Tony Coleman. Tony Coleman this, Tony Coleman that—if you let Christopher's mother tell it, Tony Coleman was the Second Coming or was, at least, born of the Virgin Birth. Christopher hates Tony Coleman worse than he hates church, school, and rained out baseball games. At every opportunity, he tells Tony just how he feels about him. Since he was a baby, the entire community has pegged Tony as the next minister. During church services Tony sits up front with the grown folks. Christopher sits in the back, a couple of rows from the other children. He does not get along well with most of the children because they, according to him, mindlessly accept the rules of what they should be, but he hates Tony the most because he perpetuates the rules like a middle-school recess evangelist. Tony is everything that Christopher's mother wants. Tony is everything that Christopher hates.

After services Tony always approaches Christopher and says, "Wasn't that just a lovely sermon from the reverend."

As true as the day following the night, Christopher always responds the same way, "Man, I don't know. I was sleep—like I always am."

"Don't be sleep when the Lord comes back," asserts Tony.

"Well, the Lord better not come back at night or during church services. 'Cause if he does, I'm gon' be sleep."

“You’re hopeless,”

“And you’re a pain; be gone preacher boy.”  
Christopher snaps.

Tony turns to leave, “I’m going to pray for you Christopher.”

“Good”, Christopher proclaims, “I have a test tomorrow, and I ain’t looked at the book.”

The truth is that Christopher is an excellent student. It is Tony who has problems with schoolwork. When they get back their homework or test papers Christopher always takes this opportunity to point out Tony’s deficiency in class, “I don’t understand it. You know the whole *Bible*, yet you can’t study for a unit test. Are you sure your line to Jesus is working?” Tony never speaks in anger to Christopher; he only responds, “I’ll do better next time. The Lord knows what I need.”

“You need a tutor. Won’t you pray for the Lord to provide that,” Christopher spits out, smiling like the Grinch who stole Christmas.

To this, Tony calmly responds, “Instead of mocking me and the Lord, why don’t you offer your services to help me.”

“Unless the Lord done gave you thirty pieces of silver as payment to me, you can forget it. In fact, tell the Lord to call my people, and we can work something out.”

“I will pray about this situation and about you Christopher.” This makes Christopher’s blood to boil.

School is a breeze to Christopher. He reads all the time. His father always gives him books for his birthday or Christmas. Christopher never gets a toy without a book. Because of this, reading, remembering, and analyzing come easy to him. The problem is that Christopher knows that he is smart and questions everything, including his mother’s old religion. This causes constant problems between Christopher and his mother—this and the fact that Christopher wants to move to Jackson to prove that he knows where his daddy is...to be with his daddy.

When church ends, people begin to fellowship as they leave the building. As parishioners file in their various directions, they look like a well-organized ant community, streaming to and fro' in meticulous regulation. In his usual spot, the minister greets worshipers, graciously taking their compliments and redirecting them toward God while passing out words of encouragement like Tylenol capsules. As usual, Christopher is trying to figure out a way of getting out of church without having to pass by the minister and acting like he understands and agrees with those words of encouragement that his brain generally rejects like a body turning away an incompatible organ. Turning to go the other way, Christopher hears the one phrase that always twists his stomach into knots. "The Lord's will be done, Sister." Like a fiery flash of light, the minister notices the wrinkled raisin scowl on Christopher's face as a response to his last statement. In a mathematical fashion, the minister bids farewell to the leaving worshipers while making his way toward Christopher. Christopher, noticing the minister's traveling direction, tries to hang a U-turn at the *Daniel in the Lion's Den* portrait, but he is cut off by someone who wishes to admonish him for chewing gum during service. Giving this old person the brush-off along with a hand full of wet gum, Christopher attempts to dash for the side exit, but is met by the equally swift minister.

"Ah, good day young Christopher."

"If you say so Rev."

"Is it not a good day?"

"You tell me; you're closer to the Big Man than I am."

"On the contrary Christopher, we are all equally close to him." Getting no response, the minister digs deeper. "I sense that something is bothering you. Care to share it?"

"Do I *have* to if I don't want to?"

"No, Christopher, no one *has* to do anything that they don't want to?"

“But, you’ll think less of me if I don’t tell you, so I really do *have* to tell you *if* I want to stay in your good graces.”

“No, Christopher, my love is unconditional.”

“So, why isn’t God’s?”

“It is.”

“Is it? If so, why does He give us our *own* will, then gets pissed off when we follow that instead of His *precious* will?”

The minister, understanding that this is a loaded question, wants to answer both the physical and metaphysical aspects of Christopher’s question. Looking at Christopher’s awkward twelve-year-old stance and understanding his choppy but intense statements, the minister realizes that puberty is prying countless doors that seem to be flying open uncontrollably with no male hand to pass a key or hold the doorknobs. And of course, the minister’s understanding has been made keener with Christopher’s mother coming by asking for prayer for her wayward son who, as of late, has refused to do anything that his mother asks.

“God loves us Christopher. So when God made man, it was a lot like us having babies. When we get old enough, we all want to have babies because we all have love to give.”

“Not all the time,” Christopher interjects.

With a raised eyebrow, the minister carefully wades the waters of Christopher’s assertion, “What do you mean?”

“Well, according to my mama, my cousin Dorissa’s baby wasn’t born out of love but as a mistake.”

“It may have been a mistake *when* she had the baby, but babies, themselves, are never mistakes. Babies are the best example of our capacity to love for babies are wholly dependent on our love. So, we have babies to satisfy our desire to love, unconditionally. And this is a big investment because sometimes there is a chance that the babies will not always love us back or will, a lot of times, disappoint us. It is the same with God. He created us so

that he could love us. However, he did not make us robots because he wanted us to love Him back of our own free will. It's also like having friends. You don't want your friends to love you because you can give them candy. You want them to love you just because they love you."

"Yeah, but God promises us candy."

"How so?"

"Those who live like he wants us to live gets to go to heaven, and those who don't are sentenced to hell. How fair is that?"

"Well, it's *His* world. So, obeying *His* rules is a small price to pay for having all of your needs met. But also, God's rules are not about making Him happy, but about making all of us happy. His rules teach us how to love the world like we love ourselves. Our will tends to be selfish and only concerned with what we want, which often times causes us to hurt others. God's will is about making the world perfect. But even if we go against His will, He continues to love us, even if He is disappointed in us. Just like with parents. Sometimes parents are disappointed and let down, but they continue to love us."

"Like the time I painted the lyrics of Prince's "Sexuality" on the walls of the church basement?"

Stumbling to find composure and to put that image and incident from his mind, the minister replies "Yes, like that. Your mother was disappointed, but she forgave you because she loves you."

"So why did she beat me?"

"To teach you a lesson. Yes, your mother was angry with you, but that whipping didn't come from anger, it came from love. It was wrong of you to damage somebody else's property."

Looking like a brightly shining black imp, Christopher asserts, "But *you* always say that the House of the Lord belongs to us *all*."

"Yes, it does, but it belongs to us equally. No one person has more claim to it than another. So, no one should do anything to it that will damage it or keep others from being able to use it. And on a bigger level, that's how the

world works. The *world* belongs to us *all*, and no one person has more of right to it than anyone else. That's the lesson that your mother was trying to teach you."

"But why the whipping?"

"Sometimes, especially when we are young, we are able to remember things if we can associate them with something, like pain. For instance, a shepherd is supposed to protect his sheep. If a sheep wanders too far from the flock, it risks harm. Sometimes, a shepherd will break the sheep's leg to teach it a lesson. The pain of the break is associated with the harm that can come when we fail to follow God's rules. When we fail to follow God's rules, we open ourselves to the harm of the world. We must always remember that God's whippings are tempered with the comfort of love; whereas, the world's whippings are tempered with the sting of ambivalence. The memory of the pain of the whipping causes you to remember that it is wrong to damage property. You are also reminded that there are consequences for your actions."

"Like when coach makes us run laps for messing up?"

"Something like that. So now do you better understand why it's best for us to follow God's will."

"What you say makes sense Rev., but what's in my mind don't always jive with what's in my heart. I mean y'all always talkin' 'bout don't, don't, don't, and I'm all about do, do, do. Ya'll in the slow lane Rev. And, that's good for y'all 'cause y'all old. But I'm a new model with low miles. I needs to be in the fast lane. Later, Rev. I gots to go."

With a combustible combination of sadness and joy, the minister watches Christopher leave with his mother and grandmother. Just then, one of the church's busy bodies addresses the minister. Her big drooping hat with an ostrich feather flowing from front to back precedes her immediate presence by a full three seconds. Yet, her biting words always bring an exclamation point to her arrival.

"That young man got the Devil in 'em."

Without looking toward the elder, the minister responds in a soft, warm, and watery tone “Don’t we all...” his words rebuffing the good sister and at the same time sending up a prayer for Christopher.

Quickly, the elder busy body snaps, “Yes, but some more than others.”

Turning toward the elder, “You’re right sister.” As a grin begins to explode across the elder sister’s face, the minister continues, “David was much more of a hell-raiser than Moses, but he continued to have the heart of God. If David can get into the pearly gates, I’m sure that Christopher has a chance.” Noticing the elder sister’s displeasure, the minister ends. “That boy’s a house divided...as we all are...And from time to time, we all need a helping hand of mediation...More than anything sister, we must be careful how that hand is administered.”

For Christopher, going to church ranks right up there with going to the dentist. It is not the church going that he hates as much as he resents the fact that he does not have a choice in going. Christopher knows that three times a week he is going to be in church. Of course he has to go on Sunday. But he also has to go to choir practice on Mondays at six o’clock and Bible study on Tuesdays at six o’clock. For most people, Wednesday is hump day. For Christopher, Wednesday is “No Church” or “Release” Day. His friends take every opportunity that they can to tease him about the amount of time he spends in church. On Saturdays, when the church is being cleaned, his friends yell out, “Hey Christopher, the doors of the church are open; shouldn’t you be there cleaning?” Christopher responds with some favorite four letter expletive, and a fight ensues. Other than a fight here and there, Christopher manages to reconcile himself to going, but he is never able to understand Sunday evening church service. “What is it that the Rev. is going to tell us tonight that he couldn’t have said this morning? I mean is it my fault that he forgot something?” This never makes sense to Christopher. So one day, during the spring of his twelfth year while

watching a caterpillar break free from its prison and become a sovereign butterfly, Christopher decides, "That's it! I'm not going back to church tonight. They can do what they want to do, but I'm not going back!...Now I just have to think of a way of not going and not getting killed." Christopher wants liberty; he just is not ready to trade his life for it. Then, standing in his car port, looking at the vacant lot next door, Christopher is overcome with the most brilliant idea of his life. Because of the years of natural erosion, the vacant lot is filled with small hills. After a good rain, the hills become a good surface for an excellent battle royal of "King of the Hill." The rain turns the dirt mountains into muddy slopes. The kids climb to the top of a mountain and try to knock each other down the hill into the muddy water.

Christopher rushes inside to put on his new, navy blue, three-piece Easter suit and brown plastic-leather shoes, which is not more than four months old. His mother is not home, so he knows he will be able to sneak back out in his suit. While getting dressed his grandmother notices, "Baby, it's two more hours before church. You getting dress awful early." "Well, grandmamma," Christopher responds smugly, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." After he finishes getting dressed, he announces, "Grandmamma, I'm going to stand on the porch until it's time to go." Then he dashes out the door. He does not stop running until he is at the edge of the largest mud hill in the lot. The kids begin to tease him, "Boy, you better get home befo' your mama catch you out here and beat your ass with the flyswatter like she did when you ate all the chicken wings that were reserved for the pastor." All of the kids laugh, but Christopher stands defiantly, mocking them with his King Tut-air of confidence. Then he speaks, as if he is Jesus shedding new light onto his disciples, "I'm not going to church tonight."

Bighead Bernard responds, "Nigga you goin' somewhere wit dat Easter suit on."

Skillet chimes in, “His ass goin’ to the hospital if his mamma catch him out here.”

Becoming disgusted with their obvious and heavily weighted wet ignorance, Christopher puffs out a heavy breath of air and heads up the muddy mountain.

“Dat nigga done lost his mind,” yells Beaver-Teeth Brad. As Christopher trudges up the side of that mud heap, flecks, chunks, and pieces of mud begin to fly everywhere, landing up and down his pants legs. Once at the top, shoes covered in wet blackness, socks soaked to the toes, and pants legs fading in and out from black to blue, Christopher stands there as if he has just conquered Mount Kilimanjaro. With one last defiant, smug puff of breath, Christopher dives head first into the muddy pool of water at the bottom of the hill. Splash! A triumphant gush of water thrusts upward, falling down and covering Christopher’s entire soul. He is dirty from the inside out, and he loves it. He stands up and falls back into the water to ensure that his back is completely covered in muddy water. Then he lies on his stomach and crawls up the muddy mountain, grinding in as much mud as possible. He slides on his back down the mountain and back into the water, for good measure. Christopher has become the preacher at his own muddy baptism, creating his own rite of passage to break free from the conservative clutches of the church and his mamma. The other kids stand there in shock. They know that Christopher’s mother is not above beating the hell out of him right there on the lot. Speechless, they watch him crawl out of the muddy pool and slush back into the house. As he gets farther away from them, Bighead Bernard somberly proclaims, “I knew all of that church was gon’ run dat boy crazy. You saw him; he was out here trying to baptize himself.”

Once in the house, Christopher tries to conceal his joy at being able to finally out smart his mother and grandmother. His grandmother notices him but does not say a word. Feeling full of himself, Christopher speaks, “Grandmamma, I slipped in the mud....I...I guess I can’t

go to church to night.” It is difficult being humble when inside he knows that he is a genius.

His grandmother finally speaks, but there is very little emotion, “Go take a bath.”

Stunned by her lack of emotion, Christopher assures himself, “I guess she knows when she’s been whipped.” Once down the hall, he swaggers into the bathroom. He finds the Ivory liquid, begins to run a bubble bath, and undresses.

“Leave the clothes on the floor next to the door,” his grandmother tells him.

Christopher gets into the tub and begins to enjoy his victory bath. His grandmother’s arm slides through the door and picks up the clothes like a snake looking for a nest of bird eggs. After a couple of minutes, while still in the tub, Christopher hears the washing machine. “She must not want them to stain,” he thinks to himself.

Like the calm wind blowing in storm clouds, Christopher’s grandmother comes into the bathroom, locking the door behind her. Quicker than a flash of lightening, she brings her right hand from behind her to expose a well wrapped, well worn extension cord. All Christopher remembers is the first lick. Then his body goes numb. In the hurried excitement and panic of the moment, Christopher is only able to utter, sporadically, “Grandma wait...Grandma that hurts...Please stop grandma.” Along with his pleas for mercy, Christopher’s grandmother spits out sporadic phrases like an old hooptie needing a tune up, all the while allowing the licks from the extension chord to flow like Niagara Falls, slicing through him like nails on a rugged cross. “Boy...you and your damit ass...you must be crazy...out yo’ damn mind...I’m gon’...yo’ ass....” Between the snaps of the cord along Christopher’s backside, the splashes of water, and the verbal ejaculations of Christopher and his grandmother, there is a constant call for the Lord to “Come down rite now Lawd...Jus’ come down rite now, Lawd...please Jesus...Oh Lawd!” And then there is blackness.

When he wakes up, the first thing Christopher realizes is that he is flat on his back with his arms spread out like an eagle. Next, he notices that he can hardly move and is only able to slightly raise his head. He tilts his head downward and notices that his brown Sunday shoes are on his feet.

“What the...” he groggily mumbles to himself. “Where am I?...” he continues to mumble.

As the darkness begins to give way to a faint, dulled light, he realizes that he is lying on his back on his bed, in his blue Easter suit. Years into adulthood, he never remembers getting dressed, only that when he arises from the dead, he is fully covered in the same cleansed clothes that were soiled by his dirty deeds. Now, there is not a spot of sin on the deep, dark navy blue suit or his caramel hide.

After initially regaining consciousness, Christopher remembers very little clearly until he walks through the church doors. He is greeted by the new central air conditioning of the church and realizes that his suit is still damp from having been washed a little over an hour ago. It is also then that he feels the severe pain and soreness of his body, which is covered in welts left behind by the extension cord like the famous nail marks left in the hands, side, and feet on Christopher’s woolly headed ancestor. His back and thighs carry the brunt of the whipping. He has to move quite gingerly to ease the pain and keep the wet suit off his body. After being greeted by the preacher, his grandmother asks the reverend if he could spare a few minutes after evening services to lay hands on the child to help remove some of those rebellious spirits that have taken over the boy’s body and mind. The minister looks at the wincing boy and thinks to himself that somehow the sermon of the extension chord is more than enough to drive away the evil spirits. Further, any spirits, which are still inside Christopher, are only there because they are in too much pain to move. But he feels confident that the leftover evil spirits will be leaving Christopher’s body as soon as

they are strong enough to do so. He does, however, do a laying on of the hands to appease Christopher's grandmother and to ask the Lord never to allow this child to try anything that stupid again. Thinking about Christopher's own analogy, he smiles to himself thinking that his grandmother pulled him in for a pit stop that he'll never forget.

Though Christopher never does reconcile himself to going to church, he never, again, attempts not to go. The welts on his body eventually fade, but the welts on his soul remain as a permanent reminder of what happens when he crosses God and grandmamma. Consequently, his petals no longer get tangled with wayward weeds, and he has become a better driver. He may not know his city of destination, but he understands the necessity of driving 55.