

## Between the World and Me

Richard Wright

And one morning while in the woods I stumbled  
suddenly upon the thing,  
Stumbled upon it in a grassy clearing guarded by scaly  
oaks and elms  
And the sooty details of the scene rose, thrusting  
themselves between the world and me....

There was a design of white bones slumbering forgottenly  
upon a cushion of ashes.  
There was a charred stump of a sapling pointing a blunt  
finger accusingly at the sky.  
There were torn tree limbs, tiny veins of burnt leaves, and  
a scorched coil of greasy hemp;  
A vacant shoe, an empty tie, a ripped shirt, a lonely hat,  
and a pair of trousers stiff with black blood.  
And upon the trampled grass were buttons, dead matches,  
butt-ends of cigars and cigarettes, peanut shells, a  
drained gin-flask, and a whore's lipstick;  
Scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the  
lingering smell of gasoline.  
And through the morning air the sun poured yellow  
surprise into the eye sockets of the stony skull....

And while I stood my mind was frozen within cold pity  
for the life that was gone.  
The ground gripped my feet and my heart was circled by  
icy walls of fear--  
The sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the  
grass and fumbled the leaves in the trees; the woods  
poured forth the hungry yelping of hounds; the  
darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the witnesses rose and lived:  
The dry bones stirred, rattled, lifted, melting themselves  
into my bones.

The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into  
my flesh.

The gin-flask passed from mouth to mouth, cigars and  
cigarettes glowed, the whore smeared lipstick red  
upon her lips,  
And a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that  
my life be burned....

And then they had me, stripped me, battering my teeth  
into my throat till I swallowed my own blood.  
My voice was drowned in the roar of their voices, and my  
black wet body slipped and rolled in their hands as  
they bound me to the sapling.  
And my skin clung to the bubbling hot tar, falling from  
me in limp patches.  
And the down and quills of the white feathers sank into  
my raw flesh, and I moaned in my agony.  
Then my blood was cooled mercifully, cooled by a  
baptism of gasoline.  
And in a blaze of red I leaped to the sky as pain rose like water, boiling my limbs  
Panting, begging I clutched childlike, clutched to the hot  
sides of death.  
Now I am dry bones and my face a stony skull staring in  
yellow surprise at the sun....