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"Bye Baby"

Theresa Todd
Concordia University - Portland

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"BYE BABY"

Theresa Todd

Like all young boys of the day, you are
Rowdy, brash and cool as Cousin Curtis.
Long walks on the dusty roads on a hot Mississippi
Summer afternoon, swearing, daring and playing cool.

Long days spent laughing, joking,
Making bets and taking dares.
You are young, wide-eyed, and round-faced.
A man in the making.

Many days spent escaping the heat in the small,
Crowded corner store where you buy your nickel candy,
Drink pop and talk about girls you've had and will have.
Spotting the white woman in the corner, Curtis dares you to:

"Talk to that white woman over there. Bet you won't."
Brave bold boys made more bold and brave in
The presence of other boys. Taking cocky strides you walk
By the white woman and say, "Bye Baby."

Long confident strides lead you out of earshot so the
Laughs, shouts, and told-you-so's could ensue.
Young and black in 1955 leaves you unaware
Your words will leave you battered and broken.

You soon make your way home in a brown wooden crate.
Received by a mother stricken by grief, vengeful,
Ready to make known the brutality that parted
A mother from her only son.

Casket open, allowing the world to see white men's
Rage displayed on the 14 year-old face once belonging
To a smart dressing, smooth talking boy, like all boys his age.
Such hatred displayed on such a young face draws spectators.

Crowds die down, broken mother
Leans close to broken son and
Through a mother's tears says one last time:
"Bye Baby."