

Pursuit

A poem inspired by Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

By Kim Seungjae

Pecola, shy of twelve, has eyes of pitch,
 When glam'rous girls she sees make sight through blue.
 For this she begs divine redress, a switch
 Of God, who will re-daub their colors new:
 Then she, possessed of wondrous bright blue eyes,
 Will want, "Is love to come from my new guise?"

The Breedloves lived in dank dilapidation,
 A dingy den encasing few home comforts;
 Rough quarters rank of gross inebriation,
 Where Poppa belches booze in snorting slumber.
 The ethyl vapors prick the daughter's nostrils,
 Who feigning sleep, lies wond'ring at the bottles.

Her ears perk up at Mother Breedlove's tread;
 A sudden chill sinks into her bare arm,
 She brings her knees in closer, dips her head,
 Curled tight, a speck, she cannot come to harm.
 She briefly lies in stillness—spare respite—
 Before she rises to face life, upright.

With speed she scuttles straight out to the hall,
 Her gaze averted from the double bed,
 Where lay her father stark, not clothed at all,
 His mouth agape, his beefy thighs wide-spread;
 The blanket, crumpled by nocturnal throes,
 Now feebly covered just his yellowed toes.

Her skirting flight stops at the windowsill,
 Where her soft gaze sets on her neighbors' homes.
 Spare dwellings, yet deserving her goodwill,
 Because, she's sure, they're finer than her own:
 Those houses keep well-liked and happy girls,
 Whose mamas treasure them like clams their pearls.

This Saturday she's eager to go play—

If play can be conceived as simple leave,
 A spell removed from creeping Sorrow's way—
 The blood-suck canker she has long perceived,
 Subconsciously (for name it she could not),
 The dearth of love that brings full souls to rot.

She lightly steps out onto thirty-fifth,
 Throws furtive glances round the sleepy street
 And marks her way. She stoops her head forthwith,
 Next folds her arms, and scampers with fast feet.
 Her dress is tickled by a cool spring breeze,
 And flutters to embellish her unease.

Her fleet-foot bolt quick brings her to a tree;
 A film of perspiration gilds her brow.
 So gaining rest in cooling shade sits she,
 Fatigued, browbeat, held safe by nature now.
 And yet she knows this haven cannot hold,
 Since soon she must return to torments old.

In this dull daze not long Pecola sat,
 Before a form broke in her solitude.
 It crept upon its toes, this ebon cat;
 Approaching in distinct solicitude.
 The forlorn girl could only stare transfixed,
 For kitty's eyes were crystal blue, unmixed.

When near, the feline mewed endearingly,
 And sweet affection bloomed in 'Cola's heart,
 And shared a warmth that long-confined, now free,
 Shot through alacritous, a flaming dart.
 From hips to toenails; shoulders, fingertips;
 Heat even curled a smile upon her lips.

She stroked the cat behind its ears, it purred
 In pleasant baritone. It raised its chin
 And shut its eyes, euphoric in black fur.
 It nuzzled ticklishly against her shins,
 Its loins pressed fondly up against her flesh,
 Tail coiled about her; girl in love enmeshed.

Soft flick of tail, a spring off its hind legs,
The cat bolts off, alluring inky streak.
A ways away, it jumps off fencing pegs,
A leap, it lands, turns back, and yowls a squeak.
 The girl looks on, stood quizzical and shy;
 A second squeal... a beckon!—she's realized.

Without a thought, she bounds into the street,
A coming car—quick brake—sharp oaths, profane;
The startled driver's, 'Cola's eyes now meet.
Her terror marked, his anger slightly wanes.
 He frowns, he grunts, he terminates his gaze,
 And driving from, shouts "Learn to look both ways."

The chase revives, to which the cat reacts
By charging off once more. A blink, it's out,
Beyond her childish reach... She's on its tracks,
Intent to have it now. It next slows down,
 She fast gains ground, but then, a step that stumbles—
 Caught in a hostile crack, she takes a tumble.

She feels hot tears amass behind her eyes,
As biting pain throbs from her injured knee.
The tears she fights, the prickly pain likewise;
Her kneecap's scored but not too bloodily.
 With valiant strain she rises to her feet,
 And at that moment hears the mewed entreat.

She turns her head suffused with bubbling dread,
And sees the cat sat in an alleyway,
Its clear blue eyes fixed staring straight ahead,
Upon her form, as though it means to stay.
 So pained she limps toward the waiting cat,
 Which moves no muscle, staying where it's sat.

The cat accepts her hesitant caress,
And twists about her hand and shakes its ears.
Pecola crouches down; puss paws her dress,
And lifts its head to lap what's left of tears.

Then like a flash the cat o'erleaps her shoulder,
Deserts the girl, who's left with feelings colder.

That night in dream she's met by Gabriel.
He asks, "Child, wherefore wouldst thou swap thine eyes?
Are not the LORD's intents alway ideal?"
"I know not but disdain these orbs give rise."
Next morn she woke with wondrous bright blue eyes,
Expectant—"Is love to come from my new guise?"