

A Translation of Jean Toomer's Short Story "Blood-Burning Moon"

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Motivation

Although Jean Toomer is a critically acclaimed writer from the Harlem Renaissance, his work has not been translated into Dutch. His work has a challenging nature; Toomer's prose, for instance, is very poetic. An additional challenge is his use of the African American dialect, which he is said to have rendered very accurately (Solard 556). From the short story collection *Cane* I chose "Blood-burning Moon" because it is a very interesting story, containing many of the characteristics of Toomer's style.

About the author and *Cane*

Jean Toomer's short story "Blood-burning Moon" was first published in 1923 as part of *Cane*. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1894, Toomer was raised by his mother and grandfather. Although he attended several colleges, he never completed a degree. Growing up in a white community, he struggled with his racial identity because of his mixed race. It is generally assumed he associated himself more with the white race, also because he stopped writing African American literature after *Cane* (Rusch 17). Soon after leaving college, he began publishing stories and poems in avant-garde magazines, influenced by his literary friends who were part of the literary movement known as modernism (16). It is therefore not surprising that Toomer also explored new forms of writing. "The author's contribution to Harlem Renaissance literature," *Cane* is a composite work of short stories, poems, and a play (Bahm et al. 1816). The book is divided into three parts, which together form a whole. The author explores the possibility of an alienated African American finding his roots by visiting and connecting with the old South. The first part is set in rural Georgia and consists of number of short stories and poems about African Americans in the South. In part two, Toomer his characters in urban environments like Washington, D.C., and

Chicago, coming full circle in the third part with a return to Georgia. Although each story, poem, and play can be taken as a text on its own, concerned with different characters, together they form a whole. This was the author's intention and he did not approve of its being taken apart (Rusch 15). "Blood-Burning Moon" is the last text of the first part.

Summary of "Blood-Burning Moon"

The story is set in the rural American South in the 1920s and follows a young African-American woman, Louisa, and her two lovers, Tom Burwell, another Negro, and Bob Stone, a white Southerner as they return home from work at dusk. Tom and Bob, both realizing they have competition regarding Louisa, come to her house to confront each other. In their jealousy they start a fight which ends with Tom slicing Bob's neck. Bob returns to the white part of town where he collapses in his friends' arms. Immediately, a mob converges on Tom to take revenge for his brutal act. Taken to the old factory where slaves used to work before the abolition of slavery, Tom is tied to a stake and burned. The narrated time is short, probably not longer than two hours. The full moon is an omen and a foreshadowing of the tragic end of the story. Each of the characters sees the red moon rising towards a cloudbank. The title itself is taken from a song Louisa sings against the spell of the moon. When Tom is lynched by the mob, Louisa sees the red moon behind him through the flames.

Skopos

As a modernist writer of the Harlem Renaissance, Toomer's style contributed largely to the success and critical acclaim of *Cane*. The objective in translating "Blood-Burning Moon" is to translate it as if it were part of a complete translation of *Cane*. This translation of the complete

collection of stories, poems, and plays in *Cane* is to be published in Dutch in the 21st century, but has to be recognized as an American text from the Harlem Renaissance, influenced by modernism.

The communicative situation of the source text

In her essay about source text analysis, Christiane Nord argues that it is very important to analyze the source text in its context (Nord 146). As mentioned above, the text was written during the 1920s, which was a defining period in American history and culture. After World War I, culture and society saw a great change brought about by new technologies and revolutionary ideas about social values. There was a move away from the traditional Protestant values (Bahm et al. 1179). This non-conformist movement argued for a more tolerant attitude towards alternative lifestyles and sexual morals. New technologies and scientific discoveries played an important role in creating greater mobility and shaping culture on a national level. In response to the devastating effects of the war, modernism first arose in Europe. Many American modernist artists spent time abroad in Paris or London, which were at that time the capitals for modern art. Bahm et al. identify modernist works as dealing with the post-war modern society, but more narrowly “represent[ing] the transformation of traditional society under the pressures of modernity, and break[ing] down traditional literary forms in doing so” (1184). In the years following the war, African Americans became more mobile, as a result of which many moved from the South to the North; this is also known as the Great Migration (1180). During this period there was a general urbanization, so it is not surprising that many African Americans ended up in one of the many growing cities. In New York City, Harlem became an almost exclusively African-American area where population soared during the first few decades of the 20th century.

It soon became the place where many artists worked from and therefore the capital of African American culture (Drowne and Hubert 186). Collectively, they came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Class difference and social mobility were important themes in the cultural expressions of that period. Much of African American literature is about the exploration of identity in American culture at large, or more restricted (racially defined) subcultures (Bahm et al. 1180). This is also true for Jean Toomer's work, in which he also explores the African-American identity both in the old rural society and the new urban environment. Although probably not one of the high modernist artists such as T.S. Eliot or Hilda Doolittle, Toomer was influenced by several modernist friends.

The text is embedded in American culture and history. Toomer's story is set in the state of Georgia in an unnamed factory town. In "Blood-Burning Moon" this is not explicitly mentioned, though hinted at through the name of one of the characters, Old David Georgia. However, since this text is part of a larger collection, it should be known to the reader who has read the preceding texts. The connotations with Georgia – e.g. Southern, rural – may not be known to every reader in the target culture. However, this is not a real problem since they are made explicit in the text. The author mentions that factory town is in the South and from his description of the locale its rural character is revealed. In the translation, the story retains its American setting.

The avant-garde movement, to which Toomer contributed by publishing in several of their magazines, appealed mainly to a relatively small group of intellectuals and artists. Although *Cane* received critical acclaim, only 500 copies were sold in the year of its publication (McKay, par. 4). This work was intended for an intellectual audience who could understand and appreciate Toomer's writing and continues to fascinate a mainly academic audience to this day (par. 4).

“Blood-Burning Moon may not be as nuanced and double-layered as the other texts in *Cane*, the target audience of the translation will very likely be the same, especially since the objective is to translate this text as if it were part of a complete translation of *Cane*.

The source text was published almost a century ago, which means it is also somewhat removed from an American reader. This temporal difference is not noticeable in the language and does not result in any problems in translation. In the target text, modern Dutch has been used.

Although the theme and cultural context of the source text do not present immediate difficulties, there are some elements that do. Toomer’s use of the word “nigger” and African American dialect will be discussed separately in the next sections.

The n-word

Throughout this and other stories in *Cane*, Jean Toomer often uses the word “nigger.” Although this word once was neutral, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it started to acquire negative connotations in the 18th century (par. 5). Today, this word is usually avoided, especially by non-Africans. Interestingly, the word is used as a neutral or even favorable term by African Americans themselves, although they too use it in a derogatory manner (“Nigger”). Toomer was a mulatto, with both African and Western ancestry. In “Blood-Burning Moon” both white Americans and African Americans use the word and it is not always clear whether they use it in contempt or not. For example, Bob Stone is a white man, but he is in love with an African American girl, Louisa. On his way to Louisa, Toomer describes his thoughts as he is thinking about slavery and the possibility of revealing his love to Louisa. “His family had lost ground. Hell no, his family still owned the niggers, practically. . . . Was there something about niggers

that you couldnt [sic] know? . . . Nigger was something more. . . . Something to be afraid of, more? Hell no. Who ever heard of being afraid of a nigger?” (Toomer 31-32). In these lines, the word may well be used in a derogatory and contemptuous way. However, a few lines later, when Bob turns his thoughts to Louisa, he might be using it in a less abusive way when he describes the object of his affection as a “[b]eautiful nigger gal” (32). At the same time, he is in a debate with himself whether he should really use the n-word: “Why nigger? Why not, just gal? No, it was because she was nigger that he went to her” (32). It seems he is aware of the negative connotations of the word, but uses it deliberately because he loves her precisely because she is African American.

When the word is used by other Negroes, it does not seem to be used in a positive manner either. One of the men sitting around the stove in the woods says of Tom Burwell, “Yassur, he sho is one bad nigger when he gets started” (32). A few lines down he says to one of the other men, “Shut up, nigger. Y dont know what y talkin bout” (32). From his speech, it is clear the speaker here is also a dark man, but he does not seem to be using the n-word quite as a neutral or even favorable term either.

Initially, I translated the word with the Dutch “neger”, which is a neutral term – more the equivalent of the English “negro.” However, I decided to use the more abusive form “nikker” because the author must have been aware of the abusive quality of “nigger” and the context justifies the interpretation that in this text it is not used as a favorable term – at least, most of the time. Also, the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives a line from Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) as an example of non-abusive use of “nigger” by the slave Jim: “Dey wuz a nigger name’ Bob, dat had ketched a wood-flat” (Twain, *Adventures* 61). This is just one of many examples where Jim’s use of non-abusive “nigger” has been translated to Dutch

“nikker” by Dabekaussen and Maters: “D’r was d’r ’n nikker die Bob heette, die had ’n houtpraam opgeduikeld” (Twain, *Avonturen* 67). Indeed, like “nigger”, “nikker” does not solely have a negative use. According to *Van Dale* it is abusive “most of the time” (“Nikker”).

An alternative solution would have been an alternation between “nikker” and “neger” in the target text. However, this would give a certain interpretation to the text, making the translator more visible. Using “nikker”, which does not exclude positive use, leaves this interpretation to the reader.

Dialect

One of the more challenging parts of the source text to translate, were the dialogues spoken in African-American dialect. According to Alain Solard, Toomer uses a very typical and realistic representation of that dialect: “A true black man is speaking here. Consider his syntax: quoting one or two examples will suffice to show that Toomer renders the black form of speech accurately” (Solard 556). He then provides this example: “Seems like th love I feels fo yo done stole m tongue” (Toomer 30). According to Solard, the confusion of person and tense, and Tom’s tone in uttering this message, show the author’s “expert knowledge of black people” (Solard 556). The difficulty is how to translate African-American English. Its syntactic and phonological characteristics are specific to that dialect only. As mentioned before, the story is kept in its original setting, which provides an additional challenge because the use of a known Dutch dialect should be avoided. Henkes and Bindervoet argue that the translator should create an artificial dialect by translating the original into the target language as if the speaker had an accent (par. 1). Many books have been published in English with African Americans speaking their dialect. Many of these books have been translated into Dutch. It may therefore not be necessary

to come up with an entirely new dialect. Unfortunately, some translators have decided to use a specific dialect that has specific geographic connotations. In the aforementioned translation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Dabekaussen and Maters' translation of Jim's dialect sounds very much like Afrikaans – especially because of the use of the double negation with “nie.” However, other elements in their translation of the dialect may be useful. Recently, a reviewer of two translations of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* suggested that translator employ similar techniques used in subtitling, i.e. abbreviating words to “’ie”, “’t” and “’n”, which accurately reflects spoken language (Spies 48).

The confusion of persons and tenses – e.g. “I feels”, “Ise” or “I is” – is something that could also be used in the artificial dialect in the translation. According to Solard, this is very typical for African Americans (556). In the translation, I have chosen to use this especially when Bob uses the second and third person singular, making his use of the first person grammatically correct. This resulted in forms like “m’n liefde . . . heb gestolen.” Another feature of the dialect in the original is Toomer's representation of Bob's speech by leaving out certain sounds and not merging certain words. In the translation something similar has been done, but not always in the same place and in the same way. For example, “th well” and other uses of “th” have *not* been translated to just “d put” or “d”. However, in other places words have been merged, so “dat ik” becomes “da’k”, “het” is abbreviated to “’t”, “een” to “’n”, “gewoon” and “geloof” become “g’woon” and “g’loof.” In the cases of subject-verb agreement and abbreviations I have followed Dabekaussen and Maters, who used similar strategies. These examples may not be typical for a dialect only. In normal speech sounds are frequently merged or omitted. Using the apostrophes in the text emphasizes this and creates the suggestion of an accent. Since it is in principle not possible to render the African American dialect perfectly in Dutch, some features have had to be

left out. Some words in the source text are mere phonetic representations of what the speakers say, e.g. “sho” (sure) and “yo” (you). In the translation such features have been left out because they might make the dialect more geographically defined.

Repetition

One of the important characteristics of this story, as well as the whole of *Cane*, is the author’s use of repetition. The three parts of the whole work together form a circle, and Toomer’s use of repetition of certain names, phrases, and songs emphasizes this. At a lower level, circles are also present in “Blood-Burning Moon.” One example of concentric circles in the story is the description of the scene in the woods. The stove is at the center of a – probably circular – clearing in the forest. Its warmth radiates outward. Men are sitting in a circle around it. Its glow spreads “fan-wise into the low-hanging heavens”; finally, the scent of boiling cane creates the largest circle: it can be smelled even in the town (Toomer 29). This theme of circles is also reflected in Toomer’s style – he uses repetition to create a sense of circular motion. In the first paragraph he uses the phrase “up from” three times, and this is echoed again in the first paragraph of the second section (28-29). The syntax of these sentences is somewhat peculiar. Although perfectly grammatical, the structure is an inversion of what is expected: “Up from the dusk the full moon came” instead of “The full moon came up from the dusk” (28). “Up from” has been put first for emphasis. The effect would be lost if it came mid-sentence in all three instances. In the translation, I wanted to retain this effect by creating similar sentences with the subject and verb in final position. The preposition-subject-verb pattern had to change to preposition-verb-subject for grammatical reasons. Translating “up from” presented a small challenge. Two possibilities were “vanaf” and “(van)uit”. However, both are somewhat different

whereas the English “up from” covers both “up from [a surface]” and “up from [within]”. The latter is possible in all instances where this phrase is used in the source text and all have therefore been translated by the following pattern: “Uit de schemer kwam de volle maan op.”

Toomer uses similar structures and repetitions in other places, but unfortunately it has proven very difficult to retain all of these in the target text. For example, early on in the story he uses the following: “By the way the world reckons things, he had won her. By measure of that warm glow she felt . . . , he had won her” (28). It is especially the repeated use of “by” that caused some problems in translating these sentences. Initial attempts resulted in somewhat awkward sentences like “Volgens de manier waarop de wereld tegen de zaken aankijkt, had hij haar gewonnen. Volgens die warme gloed die in haar gedachten kwam als ze aan hem dacht, had hij haar gewonnen.” Other translations starting with “Op de manier” or “Zoals” also yielded unsatisfactory results. Finally, the sentence structure has been changed in the target text but the repetition has been retained: “Het leek erop dat hij haar had veroverd – tenminste, zoals de wereld het zag. Het leek erop dat hij haar had veroverd, als je wist van die warmte die zij in haar gedachten voelde als ze aan hem dacht.”

Unusual word combinations

Another characteristic of the author’s style is his frequent use of unusual or novel word combinations. In some cases this led to some challenges in the translation process. Other instances could quite easily be transferred into the target text. For example, it was not necessary to change anything in the oxymoron “The full moon sank upward” which subsequently became “De volle maan zonk omhoog” (Toomer 31). However, the case “Rusty black and tan spotted hounds” was more challenging. Here the translation “Bruin- en geelzwart gevlekte honden” was

chosen in favor of the somewhat awkward “Roestzwarte en taankleurig gevlekte honden.” First off, “roestzwart” is highly unusual and may easily be mistaken for “roetzwart” whereas most readers will not have any idea as to what color is meant by “taankleurig.”

Culture-specific elements

There are a number of words used in the text that required some further investigation into what was exactly meant. For example, the stove which is mentioned several times could not be translated with the dictionary translations “fornuis” or “kachel.” The object is used here to burn cane stalks and extract sugar. An internet search revealed that the sugar was boiled in large pots or cauldrons on an open fire or oven-like structure. Toomer’s use of “stove” suggests the latter. In the translation this now appears as “kookkachel” and from the context it will be clear this is all happening outside.

Other culture-specific terms include “Southerner” and “Yankee” (Toomer 31). The first term has been translated as “iemand uit het zuiden.” For the second word, however, an alternative strategy has been used. Not every Dutch reader will know that a Yankee is someone from the Northern United States. Therefore, the often-used strategy of “maintaining and describing” has been used here: “een Yankee uit het noorden” (Grit 194).

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Bloedbrandende maan

1

Uit de afbrokkelende stenen muren, uit de verrotte vloerplanken en de zware met de hand gehouwen eikenbalken van de vooroorlogse katoenfabriek kwam de avondschemer op. Uit de schemer kwam de volle maan op. Zij gloeide als een brandend blok dennenhout en verlichtte de grote deur. Zacht stroomde haar licht over de rij negerhutten langs de enige straat van het fabrieksdorp¹. De volle maan door de grote deur was een slecht voorteken. Negervrouwen zongen liedjes tegen de betovering.

Louis zong terwijl ze over de heuveltop kwam, bij de keuken van haar blanke bazen vandaan. Haar huid had dezelfde kleur als de bladeren van jonge eikenbomen in de herfst. Haar borsten waren stevig en pront als rijpe eikels. En haar zingen klonk als het zachte ruisen van de wind in vijgenbomen. Bob Stone, de jongste zoon van de mensen voor wie ze werkte, hield van haar. Het leek erop dat hij haar had veroverd – tenminste, zoals de wereld het zag. Het leek erop dat hij haar had veroverd, als je wist van die warmte die ze in haar gedachten voelde als ze aan hem dacht. Tom Burwell, die door het hele dorp Big Boy werd genoemd, hield ook van haar. Maar omdat hij de hele dag op het land moest werken, en dat ook nog eens ver bij haar vandaan, had hij het haar nog nooit kunnen laten merken. Hoewel hij het vaak genoeg 's avonds geprobeerd had. Op de een of andere manier kwam hij nooit echt verder. Zo sterk als hij was met een bijl of ploeg in zijn handen, zo moeilijk vond hij het om haar vast te houden. Tenminste, dat dacht hij. Maar in werkelijkheid hield hij haar steviger bij het fabrieksdorp dan hij zelf dacht. Als

¹ The author consistently uses “factory town” without a determiner, although because it is not capitalized it appears to be used as a proper noun. In Dutch, however, leaving out the determiner makes it quite unusual. Therefore, a determiner has been added. From the context it is clear that the town is not very large (only one street and a rural setting), therefore the word “dorp” has been chosen rather than “stad(je).” Throughout the text, “factory town” will appear as “het fabrieksdorp.”

zij aan hen dacht, hield zijn zwartheid het blanke van Stone in evenwicht – ja, trok daar zelfs aan. En ze dacht af en toe aan hen terwijl ze over de heuveltop kwam, bij de keuken van haar blanke bazen vandaan. Terwijl ze zachtjes zong tegen het boosaardige gezicht van de volle maan.

Ze voelde een vreemde opwinding. Gemakshalve probeerde ze Bob of Tom als oorzaak daarvan te zien. Een ontmoeting met Bob in het suikerrietveld, zoals over een uur weer zou plaatsvinden, was niets vreemds. En het aanzoek van Tom dat ze voelde aankomen kon ook wel weer worden uitgesteld. Apart beschouwd was er aan geen van beiden iets bijzonders. Maar om de een of andere reden raakten ze, terwijl ze afwezig naar de opkomende maan keek, met elkaar verward. En uit die verwarring kwam haar vreemde opwinding. Haar lippen trilden. Het trage ritme van haar lied werd grillig en onrustig. Bruin- en geelzwart gevlekte honden, die in de donkere hoekjes van de veranda's lagen of rondsnuffelden in de achtertuinen, staken hun neuzen in de lucht en vingende trilling in haar lied op. Ze begonnen droefgeestig te keffen en te janken. Kippen werden wakker en begonnen te kakelen. Overal blaften honden en kraaiden hanen om beurten alsof ze een naargeestige morgen of goddeloos ontwaken² aankondigden. De vrouwen zongen opgewekt. Hun liedjes waren katoenpropjes om hun oren dicht te stoppen. Louisa kwam in het fabrieksdorp aan en zonk vermoeid op de trap voor haar huis neer. De maan rees naar een dikke wolk waarachter ze snel zou verdwijnen.

Rode nikkermaan. Zondaar!

Bloedbrandende maan. Zondaar!

Kom die fabrieksdeur door.

² This is another example of what has already been discussed in the introduction. In this case, there is also some ambiguity, especially because of the word “awakening”. From the context of the rising moon and sunset, this may be referring to dawn. However, coupled with “ungodly” the other meaning, i.e. a religious phenomenon, is also present. Although the second meaning might be somewhat less obvious, it is still present in the Dutch “ontwaken”.

2

Uit de diepe schemer van een open plek aan de rand van het bos kwam een zachte gloed op, die in de laaghangende hemel uitwaaierde. En overal was de lucht zwaar van de geur van kokend rietsuiker. Een grote berg rietstengels lag als een verzameling aan flarden gescheurde schaduwen op de grond. Ingespannen aan een paal, sjokte een ezel traag rondjes om de spil van de molen. Onder een slingerende olielamp bediende een neger afwisselend de ezel van een zweepslag en de molen van rietstengels. Een dikke jongen waggelde met emmers vol vers geperst sap tussen de molensteen en de kookkachel heen en weer. Damp steeg op³ uit de koperen pan. De geur van suikerriet steeg op uit de koperen pan en doordrenkte het bos en de heuvel aan de kant van het fabrieksdorp van zijn aroma. De geur doordrenkte ook de mannen die in een cirkel om de kookkachel zaten. Sommige van hen kauwden op de witte pulp van suikerrietstengels, maar dat hoefde eigenlijk niet als ze alleen de suiker wilden proeven. Je proefde suiker in het fabrieksdorp. En vanuit het fabrieksdorp kon je de zachte gloed zien die de kookkachel tegen de laaghangende hemel verspreidde.

Oude David Georgia roerde met een lange lepel in de steeds dikker wordende siroop en goot deze zo nu en dan af. Oude David Georgia lette op zijn kookkachel en vertelde aan de mannen die eromheen zaten verhalen over maneschijn en katoenplukken en bevallige nikkermeisjes. Tom Burwell kauwde op pulp en lachte met de anderen mee, totdat iemand iets over Louisa zei. Totdat iemand iets over Louisa en Bob Stone zei, over de zijden kousen die ze vast en zeker van hem had gehad. Het bloed dat naar Toms nek rees was warmer dan de gloed

³ In this and the following sentence, Toomer again uses a parallel structure with “came from.” Although in Dutch the use of “er vanafslaan” might be more natural in the first sentence, it does not work well in the second one. Therefore, “opstijgen” has been used which works for both the steam and the scent. In this case the verb “opkomen”, which has been used with the previous occurrences of “came from”, did not work out well. Therefore, an alternative has been used.

die de kookkachel verspreidde. Hij sprong op. Keek woest naar de mannen en zei, “’t Is mijn meid!” Will Manning lachte. Tom beende op hem af. Rukte hem omhoog en sloeg hem weer tegen de grond. Een paar van Mannings vrienden sprongen op om het voor hem op te nemen. Tom haalde plotseling een mes tevoorschijn en als de mannen niet snel het bos waren ingedoken zouden ze het er niet zonder kleerscheuren vanaf gebracht hebben. Toms woede was bekoeld.⁴ Hij knikte naar de oude David Georgia en verdween via het pad dat van de heuvel naar het fabrieksdorp leidde. Juist op dat moment begonnen de honden te blaffen en de hanen te kraaien. Tom voelde zich misselijk. Nu hij weg was van het gevecht en weg van de kookkachel voelde hij de kou. Hij rilde. Hij huiverde toen hij de volle maan naar de wolk zag rijzen. Hij, die nu juist geen biet gaf om de angsten van oude vrouwen. Hij dwong zichzelf aan Louisa te denken. Bob Stone. Kan maar beter niet waar zijn. Hij liep de straat in en zag Louisa voor haar huis zitten. Hij liep kalm naar haar toe en tikte tegen z’n wonderlijk gevormde gevlekte vilten hoed, zei dat hij wat tegen haar wilde zeggen en realiseerde zich toen dat hij niet wist wat hij wilde zeggen, of als hij dat wel wist, dat hij dat niet zeggen kon. Hij stak z’n grote handen in z’n overall, grijnsde, en begon weg te lopen.

“Moest je mij hebben, Tom?”⁵

“Ja, da’s wa’k wilde, Louisa.”

“Nou, hier ben ik—”

“Ja, en ik ook, maar ’t maakt toch niks uit.”

⁴ The more literal translation “Tom had er genoeg van” is not impossible in this case. However, from the context it is clear that this sentence refers to Tom’s fighting and anger. “Toms woede was bekoeld” is a more common expression in this context.

⁵ The original “Youall wants me” again has some ambiguity here. Tom wants to talk to her, which is the first meaning in this context, but he also wants to have her as his girlfriend. The Dutch verb “willen” does not work well here; it seems a contamination of “Moest je mij hebben” and “Wilde je mij spreken.” The use of “moeten” in combination with “hebben” does not exclude the second meaning of this sentence, although the first meaning might be stronger here than in the original.

“Wilde je iets zeggen...?”

“Dat wilde ’k zeker. Maar woorden is als de rondjes op ’n dobbelsteen: ’t maak nie uit hoe je d’r mee knoeit, soms komen ze g’woon nie. ’k Weet nie waarom. Lijkt d’r op dat m’n liefde voor jou m’n tong heb gestolen. Nou heb ’k ’m weer. Sjonge! Louisa, schat, ’k zou ’t je nie moeten vertellen; ’k voel da’k ’t nie moet doen omdat je nog zo jong ben ’n naar de kerk ga ’n ik heb andere meisjes gehad, maar Louisa ’k hou echt van je. Lief kind⁶, ’k heb je gezien sinds dat je hier voor ’t eerst voor de deur ’n voor de put zat en soms zong dat m’n hart zowat gebroken was. ’k Heb je meegenomen naar ’t veld, elke dag en nog vaker, en ’k kan ploegen als jij er ben en ook katoenplukken. Ja m’neer! Bijna Barlo op z’n mieter gegeven gister. Da’ deed ’k zeker. Ja m’neer! En volgend jaar heb ’k m’n eigen boerderij als ouwe Stone me vertrouwt. M’n eigen. M’n eigen balen kunnen dan betalen voor wat je nou van die blanken krijgt. Zijden kousen ’n paarse jurken – tuurlijk g’loof ’k nie wat ze zeggen over hoe je ze nou heb gekregen. Blanken doen altijd wat voor de nikkers die ze mogen. En ze kunnen niks d’r aan doen da’ ze jou mogen, Louisa. Bob Stone mag je. Tuurlijk doet’ie dat. Maar vast nie zoals iedereen zegt. Toch, lieverd?”

“’k Weet niet wat je bedoeld, Tom.”

“Tuurlijk weet je da’ nie. ’k Heb al twee nikkers neergestoken. Moest ’k doen om ’t ze duidelijk te maken. Nikkers proberen altijd van niks wat te maken. En die blanken doen nou ook nie zoveel meer als vroeger. Konden ze beter maar nie doen ook, blikskaters! Zekers nie met jou. ’k Zou ’t nie kunnen aanzien. Nee m’neer!”

“Wat zou je dan doen, Tom?”

⁶ Tom here uses “Lil gal” which is an affectionate name for Louisa. The Dutch “Klein meisje” does not have the same quality. Although with “Lief” the affectionate element is made more explicit, which is one of the pragmatic strategies as described by Chesterman, the literal meaning of “Little girl” is still reflected in the use of “kind” (Chesterman 168-69).

“Neersteken net als da’k die nikker neerstak!”

“Nee Tom –”

“’k Heb gezegd da’k dat zou doen en niks anders. Maar da’s niks om nou over te praten. Zing, lieve Louisa, en terwijl ’k luister zal ’k je ’t hof maken.”

Tom nam haar hand in de zijne. Tegen de ruwe lagen van zijn hand voelde die van haar zacht en klein. Zijn enorme lichaam zakte naast haar neer op de traprede. De volle maan zonk omhoog in het diepe paars van de wolk. Een oude vrouw bracht een brandende lamp en hing die aan de publieke waterput, die een lijvige schaduw afwierp op het midden van de straat tegenover Tom en Louisa.⁷ De oude vrouw haalde het deksel van de put, greep de ketting en begon de zware emmer omhoog te hijsen. Terwijl ze dit deed, zong ze. Gedaantes bewogen onrustig tussen lamp en raam in de voorkamers van de negerhutten. Schaduwen van de gedaantes vochten met elkaar in het grijze stof van de weg. Gedaantes openden de vensters en zongen mee met de oude vrouw. Louisa en Tom, de hele straat, al zingend:

Rode nikkermaan. Zondaar!

Bloedbrandende maan. Zondaar!

Kom die fabrieksdeur door.

3

Bob Stone slenterde vanaf zijn veranda de duisternis onder de sparrenbomen en magnolia’s in. Het heldere blanke van zijn huid verbleekte en de bloes op zijn wangen werd paars. Hij voelde zich meer bewust een blanke man, alsof zijn gemoed de balans probeerde te vinden na

⁷ This sentence has had a structural change in the target text. The original with “the well . . . whose” does not work well in Dutch when translated as “de put wiens.” This structure is unusual, especially for inanimate objects. The structure has therefore been slightly changed to a non-restrictive relative clause. The use of “wiens”, although officially grammatical, sounds like Translationese.

deze uiterlijke veranderingen. Hij passeerde het huis met de enorme openhaard, dat tijdens de slavernij als keuken van de plantage dienst deed. Hij zag Louisa over de haard gebogen. Hij ging naar binnen zoals een baas dat doet en nam haar. Direct, eerlijk, doortastend. Niets van dat stiekeme van tegenwoordig. Het contrast verafschuwde hem. Zijn familie had erop verloren. Verdorie, nee, de nikkers waren nog steeds praktisch hun eigendom. Donders, als dat nu nog zo was hoefde hij niet zo ontwijkend te doen. Wat zouden ze ervan denken als ze het wisten? Zijn moeder? Zijn zus? Hij moest hen niet noemen, niet zo over ze denken. Daar in de schemer kreeg hij er een kleur van. Met de kerels in het dorp zat het wel goed, maar hoe zat het met zijn vrienden in het noorden? Hij kon zich hun ongeloof en afkeuring zo voorstellen. Zij wisten het niet. Eerst moest hij lachen om de gedachte. Toen, met hun ogen nog steeds op hem gericht, voelde hij zich opgelaten. Hij wilde de situatie aan hen uitleggen. Uitleggen. Ze zouden hem toch niet begrijpen, en bovendien, wie had er nou ooit gehoord van iemand uit het zuiden die op z'n knieën ging voor een Yankee uit het noorden, of voor wie dan ook. Nee meneer. Hij zou vanavond Louisa zien en van haar houden. Ze was mooi – op haar eigen manier. Nikkermanier. Wat voor manier was dat? Wist hij niets van. Moet weten.⁸ Hij kende haar nu lang genoeg om het te weten. Was er iets aan negers dat je niet kon weten? Naar hen luisteren in de kerk maakte je niets wijzer. Naar hen kijken maakte je niets wijzer. Met hen praten maakte je niets wijzer – behalve als het roddels waren, behalve wanneer ze wilden praten. Natuurlijk, over het boerenleven, en drank, en dobbelen⁹ – maar die dingen waren geen nikker. Nikker was iets waar meer aan vastzat. Hoeveel meer? Meer, zodat je er bang van werd? O nee. Bang voor een nikker,

⁸ This paragraph describes Bob Stone's stream of consciousness. The author presents the character's thoughts in a similar way as they are spooking through his head. The short sentences clearly show this. In both the source and target text, this results in some unusual phrases. In the translation, this has been retained to keep the same effect.

⁹ Craps is a dice game especially popular in the United States. The name is also used in Dutch, but will be little known. In the target text, this term has been translated with the hypernym "dobbelen."

wie had daar ooit van gehoord! Tom Burwell. Cartwell had hem verteld dat Tom naar Louisa ging nadat zij thuis was gekomen. Nee! Geen nikker was er ooit met zijn meisje geweest. Hij zou iemand weleens willen zien proberen. Leuke situatie voor hem om in te zijn. Hij, Bob Stone van de oude Stone familie, op de vuist gaan met een nikker om een nikkermeisje. In de goede oude tijd... Ha! Dat waren nog eens tijden. Zijn familie had erop verloren. Toch nog niet zo heel veel. Genoeg voor hem om dwars door het suikerrietveld van oude Lemon en de bossen te gaan zodat hij haar zou ontmoeten. Ze was het waard. Mooie nikkermeid. Waarom nikker? Waarom niet gewoon meid? Nee, het was omdat ze een nikker was dat hij naar haar toeging. Heerlijk... De geur van kokend suikerriet kwam hem tegemoet. Toen zag hij de aangename gloed van de kookkachel. Hij hoorde de stemmen van de mannen die eromheen zaten. Hij wilde juist om de open plek heengaan toen hij zijn eigen naam hoorde noemen. Hij stopte. Huiverend. Leunend tegen een boom luisterde hij.

“Slechte nikker. Ja m’neer, hij ’s een slechte nikker als’ie losgaat.”

“Tom Burwell is al drie keer in de nor gesmeten¹⁰ voor steken.”

“Wat denk je dat’ie Tom Burwell gaat aandoen?”

“Weet ik veel. Weet’ie zelf nog niet. Maar als’ie het straks weet – blikskaters!”

“Niemand weet wa’ of dat’ie zal doen.”

“Jonge Stone ’s een volhouder, wat ik je zeg. Bloed van die ouwe in z’n aders.”

“Da’s waar. Hij gaat echt wel bakkeleien.”

“Wordt hier te heet voor nikkers.”

“Hou je kop, nikker. Je weet niet waar je ’t over heb.”

¹⁰ The source text here has “been on th gang.” This is obviously slang, and from the context it is clear this refers to being jailed. A substandard translation has been used here, retaining the colloquial character.

Bob Stone's oren gloeiden alsof hij ze boven de kookkachel had gehouden. Een ziedende woede welde in hem op. Het voelde alsof zijn voeten op roodgloeiende kolen stonden. Ze brachten hem snel in beweging. Hij ging langs de rand van de door de gloed verlichte cirkel. Geen twijgje knapte onder zijn voeten. Hij bereikte het pad dat naar het fabrieksdorp leidde. Liep woedend naar beneden. Halverwege veranderde hij verblind van richting. Hij viel in het suikerrietveld naast het pad. Rietbladeren sneden in zijn gezicht en lippen. Hij proefde bloed. Hij gooide zichzelf neer en groef met zijn vingers in de grond. De aarde was koel. Rietwortels namen de koorts uit zijn handen. Na een lange tijd, tenminste, zo voelde dat, bedacht hij zich dat het nu wel tijd moest zijn om naar Louisa te gaan. Hij stond op en wandelde kalm naar hun ontmoetingsplaats. Geen Louisa. Tom Burwell had haar. Aderen in zijn voorhoofd zwollen op en zetten uit¹¹. Speeksel maakte het gedroogde bloed op zijn lippen weer vochtig. Hij proefde bloed. Niet zijn eigen bloed; Tom Burwells bloed. Bob stormde door het suikerriet en ging de weg weer op. Voor hem draaide een hond het pad op in de richting van het fabrieksdorp. Bob zag hem niet. De hond sprong opzij om hem voorbij te laten gaan. Door zijn blinde haast struikelde Bob over de hond. Hij viel met een klap die hem duizelde. De hond jankte. Als een soort antwoord klonk er overal vandaan gejang. Kippen kakelden. Hanen kraaiden de bloeddoorlopen ogen van het ontwakende zuiden een welkom toe. Zangers in het dorp werd het zwijgen opgelegd. Ze lieten hun vensters zakken. Tussen het hanengekraai door zette een kille stilte zich neer op de gedaantes van Tom en Louisa die dicht bij elkaar zaten. Een gestalte haastte zich uit de schaduwen en stond voor hen. Tom sprong op.

“Wat moet je?”

“Ik ben Bob Stone.”

¹¹ Toomer uses repetition here in the source text with “distend” and “bulge.” These are effectively synonyms. In the translation, therefore, a similar pattern has been used.

“Ja m’neer – en ik ben Tom Burwell. Wat moet je?”

Bob viel hem aan. Tom stapte opzij, greep hem bij de schouder en smeed hem tegen de grond. Hield hem vast.

“Laat me opstaan.”

“Ja m’neer – maar pas op wat je doet, Bob Stone.”

Een aantal donkere gedaantes was erbij komen staan, gelokt door het rumoer van het gevecht. Bob sprong op.

“Vecht als een man, Tom Burwell, en ik zal je ervan langs geven!”

Opnieuw viel hij aan. Tom stapte opzij en smeed hem tegen de grond. Hield hem vast.

“Ga van me af, smerige nikker.”

“Nou ben je echt zelf iets begonnen. Opstaan.”

Tom sleurde hem overeind en begon op hem in te slaan. Elke klap klonk alsof het iets kostbaars raakte, iets wat zacht en onvervangbaar was. Onder hem wankelde Bob naar achteren. Hij greep in zijn zak en haalde plotseling een mes tevoorschijn.

“Ha, da’s waar ik goed in ben.”

Blauwe flits, een stalen lemmer spleet Bob Stone’s keel.¹² Hij voelde een zoetig ziek gevoel. Bloed begon te vloeien. Toen voelde hij een scherpe pijnscheut. Hij liet zijn mes vallen. Hij sloeg een hand tegen zijn keel. Zijn andere hand duwde hij boven op zijn hoofd alsof hij het neergedrukt moest houden. Hij kreunde. Hij draaide zich om en wankelde naar de heuveltop die in de richting van het blanke dorp lag. Negers die het gevecht gezien hadden slopen terug naar hun huizen en bliezen de lampen uit. Louisa, verbijsterd, hysterisch, weigerde naar binnen te

¹² The sentence-initial clause without any determiner is unusual in both the source and target text. It emphasizes the tension and sudden change in this fight.

gaan. Ze gleed uit, kromp ineen, haar lichaam overeind gehouden door het houten frame van de put. Tom Burwell leunde ertegenaan. Hij stond als aan de grond genageld.¹³

Bob bereikte Broad Street. Blanken haastten zich naar hem toe. Hij zeeg neer in hun armen.

“Tom Burwell...”

Blanke mannen stormden rond als mieren op plundertocht. Behalve het rumoer dat zij maakten was het stil. Geweren, revolvers, touw, petroleum, fakkels. Twee auto's met sterke motors en felle zoeklichten. Ze ontmoetten elkaar. Het rumoer zwol aan tot een donker geraas. Toen kon je niets meer horen behalve het geplof van hun voeten in de dikke laag stof op de weg. Hun stilzwijgen ging hen als iets massiefs voor over de heuveltop heen het fabrieksdorp in. De negers werden eronder bedolven. Het kwam tot stilstand tegen de muur van de fabriek. Tom wist dat ze eraan kwamen. Hij kon zich niet bewegen. En toen zag hij de zoeklichten van de twee auto's die op hem gericht werden. Hij voelde een schok. Hij verstijfde. Hij begon te rennen. Een schreeuw rees op uit de menigte. Tom draaide zich om en keek hen aan. Ze zwermden om hem heen. Dromden samen. Een grote man met een doodsbleek gezicht en kwabwangen kwam op hem af en stak bijna de loop van zijn geweer door zijn ingewanden.

“Handen op je rug, nikker.”

Toms polsen werden vastgebonden. De grote man duwde hem naar de waterput. Als hij erboven verbrand zou worden zou zijn lichaam naar beneden vallen als het houtwerk bezwijkt. Twee sterfgevallen voor een vermaledijde nikker. Louisa werd achteruit geduwd. De menigte kwam naar voren. De druk, de drang werd te groot. Sleep hem naar de fabriek. Brandhout en brandstapel heb je daar al. Tom ging in de aangewezen richting. Maar ze moesten hem wel

¹³ The source text has “He seemed rooted there.” Initially, this was translated with the equivalent Dutch expression “Het leek alsof hij daar wortel geschoten had.” However, this idiom is usually not used in a context of fear. The more appropriate choice in this context, therefore, is the current translation.

slepen. Ze bereikten de grote deur. Te veel om daar binnen te passen. De menigte brak in tweeën en men ging langs de beide muren. De grote man duwde hem door de deur. De menigte klemde in van beide kanten. Gespannen rumoer. Geen woorden. Een paal werd in de grond geslagen. Verrotte vloerplanken werden eromheen gestapeld. Petroleum werd over de verrotte vloerplanken gegoten. Tom werd aan de paal vastgebonden. Zijn borst was ontbloot. Nagelschrammen veroorzaakten kleine strepen bloed die naar beneden dropen en verward raakten in het haar. Zijn gezicht, zijn ogen waren strak en hard. Je zou denken dat hij al dood was ware het niet dat hij onregelmatig ademhaalde. Fakkels werden op de stapel gegooid¹⁴. Een enorme vlam gehuld in zwarte rook schoot omhoog. De menigte schreeuwde. De menigte was stil. Nu kon je Tom zien midden in het vuur. Alleen zijn hoofd, rechtop, als een zwarte steen. De geur van brandend vlees doordrenkte de lucht. Toms ogen barstten. Zijn hoofd hing naar beneden. De menigte schreeuwde. De schreeuw echode tegen de afbrokkelende stenen muren en klonk als wel honderd schreeuwen. Als wel honderd schreeuwende menigten. De schreeuw botste tegen de dikke voorgevel en viel terug. De geest van een schreeuw gleed door de vlammen heen en door de grote fabrieksdeur. Het dwarrelde als iets dat stervend is door de enige straat van het fabrieksdorp. Louisa, op de trap voor haar huis, hoorde niets maar opende langzaam haar ogen. Die zagen de volle maan gloeien in de grote deur. De volle maan, onheil, een slecht voorteken. Zachte stroomde haar licht over de huizen van de mensen die Louisa kende. Waar waren ze, die mensen? Zij zou zingen en misschien zouden ze dan naar buiten komen en met haar meedoen. Misschien zou Tom Burwell komen. In ieder geval was de volle maan in de grote deur een slecht voorteken en daar moest ze tegen zingen:

¹⁴ In this section, Toomer consistently uses a passive structure. In the previous sentences, he creates a pattern with this structure, emphasizing the different objects being focused on by placing them in sentence-initial position. A similar use of the passive structure in this and the preceding sentences has been employed.

Rode nikkermaan. Zondaar!

Bloedbrandende maan. Zondaar!

Kom die fabrieksdeur door.

Blood-Burning Moon

1

Up from the skeleton stone walls, up from the rotting floor boards and the solid hand-hewn beams of oak of the pre-war cotton factory, dusk came. Up from the dusk the full moon came. Glowing like a fired pine-knot, it illumined the great door and soft showered the Negro shanties aligned along the single street of factory town. The full moon in the great door was an omen. Negro women improvised songs against its spell.

Louisa sang as she came over the crest of the hill from the white folks' kitchen. Her skin was the color of oak leaves on young trees in fall. Her breasts, firm and up-pointed like ripe acorns. And her singing had the low murmur of winds in fig trees. Bob Stone, younger son of the people she worked for, loved her. By the way the world reckons things, he had won her. By measure of that warm glow which came into her mind at thought of him, he had won her. Tom Burwell, whom the whole town called Big Boy, also loved her. But working in the fields all day, and far away from her, gave him no chance to show it. Though often enough of evenings he had tried to. Somehow, he never got along. Strong as he was with hands upon the ax or plow, he found it difficult to hold her. Or so he thought. But the fact was that he held her to factory town more firmly than he thought for. His black balanced, and pulled against, the white of Stone, when she thought of them. And her mind was vaguely upon them as she came over the crest of the hill, coming from the white folks' kitchen. As she sang softly at the evil face of the full moon.

A strange stir was in her. Indolently, she tried to fix upon Bob or Tom as the cause of it. To meet Bob in the canebrake, as she was going to do an hour or so later, was nothing new. And Tom's proposal which she felt on its way to her could be indefinitely put off. Separately, there was no unusual significance to either one. But for some reason, they jumbled when her eyes

gazed vacantly at the rising moon. And from the jumble came the stir that was strangely within her. Her lips trembled. The slow rhythm of her song grew agitant and restless. Rusty black and tan spotted hounds, lying in the dark corners of porches or prowling around back yards, put their noses in the air and caught its tremor. They began plaintively to yelp and howl. Chickens woke up and cackled. Intermittently, all over the countryside dogs barked and roosters crowed as if heralding a weird dawn or some ungodly awakening. The women sang lustily. Their songs were cotton-wads to stop their ears. Louisa came down into factory town and sank wearily upon the step before her home. The moon was rising towards a thick cloud-bank which soon would hide it.

Red nigger moon. Sinner!

Blood-burning moon. Sinner!

Come out that fact'ry door.

2

Up from the deep dusk of a cleared spot on the edge of the forest a mellow glow arose and spread fan-wise into the low-hanging heavens. And all around the air was heavy with the scent of boiling cane. A large pile of cane-stalks lay like ribboned shadows upon the ground. A mule, harnessed to a pole, trudged lazily round and round the pivot of the grinder. Beneath a swaying oil lamp, a Negro alternately whipped out at the mule, and fed cane-stalks to the grinder. A fat boy waddled pails of fresh ground juice between the grinder and the boiling stove. Steam came from the copperboiling pan. The scent of cane came from the copper pan and drenched the forest and the hill that sloped to factory town, beneath its fragrance. It drenched the men in circle seated around the stove. Some of them chewed at the white pulp of stalks, but there

was no need for them to, if all they wanted was to taste the cane. One tasted it in factory town. And from factory town one could see the soft haze thrown by the glowing stove upon the low-hanging heavens.

Old David Georgia stirred the thickening syrup with a long ladle, and ever so often drew it off. Old David Georgia tended his stove and told tales about the white folks, about moonshining and cotton picking, and about sweet nigger gals, to the men who sat there about his stove to listen to him. Tom Burwell chewed cane-stalk and laughed with the others till some one mentioned Louisa. Till some one said something about Louisa and Bob Stone, about the silk stockings she must have gotten from him. Blood ran up Tom's neck hotter than the glow that flooded from the stove. He sprang up. Glared at the men and said, "She's my gal." Will Manning laughed. Tom strode over to him. Yanked him up and knocked him to the ground. Several of Manning's friends got up to fight for him. Tom whipped out a long knife and would have cut them to shreds if they hadnt ducked into the woods. Tom had had enough. He nodded to Old David Georgia and swung down the path to factory town. Just then, the dogs started barking and the roosters began to crow. Tom felt funny. Away from the fight, away from the stove, chill got to him. He shivered. He shuddered when he saw the full moon rising towards the cloud-bank. He who didnt give a godam for the fears of old women. He forced his mind to fasten on Louisa. Bob Stone. Better not be. He turned into the street and saw Louisa sitting before her home. He went towards her, ambling, touched the brim of a marvelously shaped, spotted, felt hat, said he wanted to say something to her, and then found that he didnt know what he had to say, or if he did, that he couldnt say it. He shoved his big fists in his overalls, grinned, and started to move off.

"Youall want me, Tom?"

"Thats what us wants, sho, Louisa."

"Well, here I am –"

"An here I is, but that aint ahelpin none, all th same."

"You wanted to say something? ..."

"I did that, sho. But words is like th spots on dice: no matter how y fumbles em, there's times when they jes wont come. I dunno why. Seems like th love I feels fo yo done stole m tongue. I got it now. Whee! Louisa, honey, I oughtnt tell y, I feel I oughtnt cause yo is young an goes t church an I has had other gals, but Louisa I sho do love y. Lil gal, Ise watched y from them first days when youall sat right here befo yo door befo th well an sang sometimes in a way that like t broke m heart. Ise carried y with me into th fields, day after day, an after that, an I sho can plow when yo is there, an I can pick cotton. Yassur! Come near beatin Barlo yesterday. I sho did. Yassur! An next year if ole Stone'll trust me, I'll have a farm. My own. My bales will buy yo what y gets from white folks now. Silk stockings an purple dresses -- course I dont believe what some folks been whispurin as t how y gets them things now. White folks always did do for niggers what they likes. An they jes cant help alikin yo, Louisa. Bob Stone likes y. Course he does. But not th way folks is awhisperin. Does he, hon?"

"I dont know what you mean, Tom."

"Course y dont. Ise already cut two niggers. Had t hon, t tell em so. Niggers always tryin t make somethin out a nothin. An then besides, white folks aint up t them tricks so much nowadays. Godam better not be. Leastawise not with yo. Cause I wouldnt stand f' it. Nassur."

"What would you do, Tom?"

"Cut him jes like I cut a nigger."

"No, Tom –"

"I said I would an there aint no mo to it. But that aint th talk f now. Sing, honey Louisa, an while I'm listenin t y I'll be makin love."

Tom took her hand in his. Against the tough thickness of his own, hers felt soft and small. His huge body slipped down to the step beside her. The full moon sank upward into the deep purple of the cloud-bank. An old woman brought a lighted lamp and hung it on the common well whose bulky shadow squatted in the middle of the road, opposite Tom and Louisa. The old woman lifted the well-lid, took hold the chain, and began drawing up the heavy bucket. As she did so, she sang. Figures shifted, restlesslike, between lamp and window in the front rooms of the shanties. Shadows of the figures fought each other on the gray dust of the road. Figures raised the windows and joined the old woman in song. Louisa and Tom, the whole street, singing:

Red nigger moon. Sinner!

Blood-burning moon. Sinner!

Come out that fact'ry door.

3

Bob Stone sauntered from his veranda out into the gloom of fir trees and magnolias. The clear white of his skin paled, and the flush of his cheeks turned purple. As if to balance this outer change, his mind became consciously a white man's. He passed the house with its huge open hearth which, in the days of slavery, was the plantation cookery. He saw Louisa bent over that hearth. He went in as a master should and took her. Direct, honest, bold. None of this sneaking that he had to go through now. The contrast was repulsive to him. His family had lost ground. Hell no, his family still owned the niggers, practically. Damned if they did, or he wouldnt have to duck around so. What would they think if they knew? His mother? His sister? He shouldnt

mention them, shouldn't think of them in this connection. There in the dusk he blushed at doing so. Fellows about town were all right, but how about his friends up North? He could see them incredible, repulsed. They didn't know. The thought first made him laugh. Then, with their eyes still upon him, he began to feel embarrassed. He felt the need of explaining things to them. Explain hell. They wouldn't understand, and moreover, who ever heard of a Southerner getting on his knees to any Yankee, or anyone. No sir. He was going to see Louisa to-night, and love her. She was lovely -- in her way. Nigger way. What way was that? Damned if he knew. Must know. He'd known her long enough to know. Was there something about niggers that you couldn't know? Listening to them at church didn't tell you anything. Looking at them didn't tell you anything. Talking to them didn't tell you anything -- unless it was gossip, unless they wanted to talk. Of course, about farming, and licker, and craps -- but those weren't nigger. Nigger was something more. How much more? Something to be afraid of, more? Hell no. Who ever heard of being afraid of a nigger? Tom Burwell. Cartwell had told him that Tom went with Louisa after she reached home. No sir. No nigger had ever been with his girl. He'd like to see one try. Some position for him to be in. Him, Bob Stone, of the old Stone family, in a scrap with a nigger over a nigger girl. In the good old days ... Ha! Those were the days. His family had lost ground. Not so much, though. Enough for him to have to cut through old Lemon's canefield by way of the woods, that he might meet her. She was worth it. Beautiful nigger gal. Why nigger? Why not, just gal? No, it was because she was nigger that he went to her. Sweet ... The scent of boiling cane came to him. Then he saw the rich glow of the stove. He heard the voices of the men circled around it. He was about to skirt the clearing when he heard his own name mentioned. He stopped. Quivering. Leaning against a tree, he listened.

"Bad nigger. Yassur, he sho is one bad nigger when he gets started."

"Tom Burwell's been on th gang three times fo cuttin men."

"What y think he's agwine t do t Bob Stone?"

"Dunno yet. He aint found out. When he does – Baby!"

"Aint no tellin."

"Young Stone aint no quitter an I ken tell y that. Blood of th old uns in his veins."

"Thats right. He'll scrap, sho."

"Be gettin too hot f niggers round this away."

"Shut up, nigger. Y dont know what y talkin bout."

Bob Stone's ears burned as though he had been holding them over the stove. Sizzling heat welled up within him. His feet felt as if they rested on red-hot coals. They stung him to quick movement. He circled the fringe of the glowing. Not a twig cracked beneath his feet. He reached the path that led to factory town. Plunged furiously down it. Halfway along, a blindness within him veered him aside. He crashed into the bordering canebrake. Cane leaves cut his face and lips. He tasted blood. He threw himself down and dug his fingers in the ground. The earth was cool. Cane-roots took the fever from his hands. After a long while, or so it seemed to him, the thought came to him that it must be time to see Louisa. He got to his feet and walked calmly to their meeting place. No Louisa. Tom Burwell had her. Veins in his forehead bulged and distended. Saliva moistened the dried blood on his lips. He bit down on his lips. He tasted blood. Not his own blood; Tom Burwell's blood. Bob drove through the cane and out again upon the road. A hound swung down the path before him towards factory town. Bob couldnt see it. The dog loped aside to let him pass. Bob's blind rushing made him stumble over it. He fell with a thud that dazed him. The hound yelped. Answering yelps came from all over the countryside. Chickens cackled. Roosters crowed, heralding the bloodshot eyes of southern awakening.

Singers in the town were silenced. They shut their windows down. Palpitant between the rooster crows, a chill hush settled upon the huddled forms of Tom and Louisa. A figure rushed from the shadow and stood before them. Tom popped to his feet.

"Whats y want?"

"I'm Bob Stone."

"Yassur – an I'm Tom Burwell. Whats y want?"

Bob lunged at him. Tom side-stepped, caught him by the shoulder, and flung him to the ground. Straddled him.

"Let me up."

"Yassur – but watch yo doins, Bob Stone."

A few dark figures, drawn by the sound of scuffle, stood about them. Bob sprang to his feet.

"Fight like a man, Tom Burwell, an I'll lick y."

Again he lunged. Tom side-stepped and flung him to the ground. Straddled him.

"Get off me, you godam nigger you."

"Yo sho has started somethin now. Get up."

Tom yanked him up and began hammering at him. Each blow sounded as if it smashed into a precious, irreplaceable soft something. Beneath them, Bob staggered back. He reached in his pocket and whipped out a knife.

"Thats my game, sho."

Blue flash, a steel blade slashed across Bob Stone's throat. He had a sweetish sick feeling. Blood began to flow. Then he felt a sharp twitch of pain. He let his knife drop. He slapped one hand against his neck. He pressed the other on top of his head as if to hold it down. He groaned.

He turned, and staggered towards the crest of the hill in the direction of white town. Negroes who had seen the fight slunk into their homes and blew the lamps out. Louisa, dazed, hysterical, refused to go indoors. She slipped, crumbled, her body loosely propped against the woodwork of the well. Tom Burwell leaned against it. He seemed rooted there.

Bob reached Broad Street. White men rushed up to him. He collapsed in their arms.

"Tom Burwell...."

White men like ants upon a forage rushed about. Except for the taut hum of their moving, all was silent. Shotguns, revolvers, rope, kerosene, torches. Two high-powered cars with glaring search-lights. They came together. The taut hum rose to a low roar. Then nothing could be heard but the flop of their feet in the thick dust of the road. The moving body of their silence preceded them over the crest of the hill into factory town. It flattened the Negroes beneath it. It rolled to the wall of the factory, where it stopped. Tom knew that they were coming. He couldnt move. And then he saw the search-lights of the two cars glaring down on him. A quick shock went through him. He stiffened. He started to run. A yell went up from the mob. Tom wheeled about and faced them. They poured down on him. They swarmed. A large man with dead-white face and flabby cheeks came to him and almost jabbed a gun-barrel through his guts.

"Hands behind y, nigger."

Tom's wrists were bound. The big man shoved him to the well. Burn him over it, and when the woodwork caved in, his body would drop to the bottom. Two deaths for a godam nigger. Louisa was driven back. The mob pushed in. Its pressure, its momentum was too great. Drag him to the factory. Wood and stakes already there. Tom moved in the direction indicated. But they had to drag him. They reached the great door. Too many to get in there. The mob divided and flowed around the walls to either side. The big man shoved him through the door.

The mob pressed in from the sides. Taut humming. No words. A stake was sunk into the ground. Rotting floor boards piled around it. Kerosene poured on the rotting floor boards. Tom bound to the stake. His breast was bare. Nails' scratches let little lines of blood trickle down and mat into the hair. His face, his eyes were set and stony. Except for irregular breathing, one would have thought him already dead. Torches were flung onto the pile. A great flare muffled in black smoke shot upward. The mob yelled. The mob was silent. Now Tom could be seen within the flames. Only his head, erect, lean, like a blackened stone. Stench of burning flesh soaked the air. Tom's eyes popped. His head settled downward. The mob yelled. Its yell echoed against the skeleton stone walls and sounded like a hundred yells. Like a hundred mobs yelling. Its yell thudded against the thick front wall and fell back. Ghost of a yell slipped through the flames and out the great door of the factory. It fluttered like a dying thing down the single street of factory town. Louisa, upon the step before her home, did not hear it, but her eyes opened slowly. They saw the full moon glowing in the great door. The full moon, an evil thing, an omen, soft showering the homes of folks she knew. Where were they, these people? She'd sing, and perhaps they'd come out and join her. Perhaps Tom Burwell would come. At any rate, the full moon in the great door was an omen which she must sing to:

Red nigger moon. Sinner!

Blood-burning moon. Sinner!

Come out that fact'ry door.