

chapter 4
GINNY'S BOOKS



WE ARRIVED IN AN ALABAMA SIMMERING WITH RACIAL STRIFE.



OF WHICH I REMAINED COMPLETELY OBLIVIOUS.



ALL OVER THE SOUTH, "OUR WAY OF LIFE" HAD COME UNDER SIEGE.



DEEP IN THE HEART OF DIXIE, JIM CROW HADN'T YET SURRENDERED TO THE INEVITABLE. BUT HIS DAYS WERE NUMBERED.

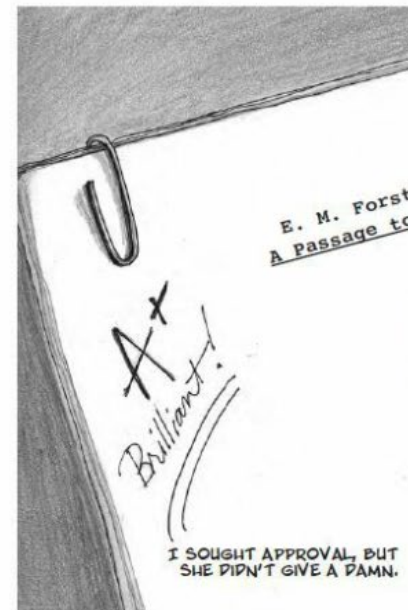


IT WAS THE SIGNS THAT HELPED ME SEE.



SHE WAS HIP AND GAVE BRAINS GLAMOUR, UNLIKE ANY OTHER SMART GIRL I KNEW.

MY SISTER GINNY, 11 YEARS OLDER, OPENED MY EYES TO MANY THINGS.



E. M. Forster's
A Passage to India

I MOLDED, BUT GINNY REFUSED TO CONFORM.

I TREMBLED, BUT SHE PARED TO QUESTION AUTHORITY.



JUPSON COLLEGE, WHERE GINNY STUDIED, SHAPED
YOUNG LADIES INTO SCHOLARS AND SOUTHERN BELLES.

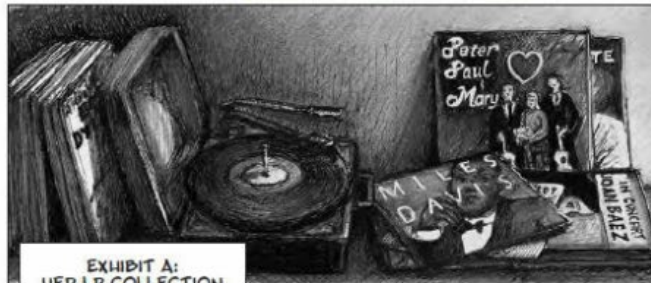


EXHIBIT B:
HER BOOKS

EXHIBIT C:
HER EYES.



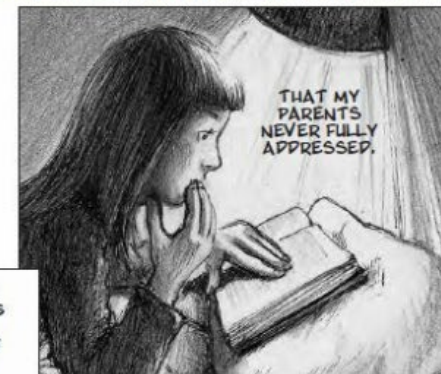
SHE'D RAISED THE PROP-DEAD
STARE TO AN ART FORM.

I IDOLIZED HER.

READING GINNY'S BOOKS FILLED OUT MY EDUCATION.



I LEARNED ABOUT THINGS THAT TEACHERS NEVER MENTIONED.



AND THAT
EVEN MY BIG
SISTERS
PASSED OFF
WITH AN
"I'LL TELL
YOU WHEN
YOU'RE OLDER."

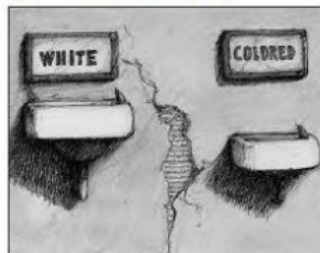


IN THE PAGES OF BLACK LIKE ME, I READ THE ACCOUNT OF A WHITE WRITER, JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, WHO IN 1959 WENT UNDERCOVER AS A BLACK MAN.

HE DARKENED HIS SKIN WITH THE AID OF A DRUG.



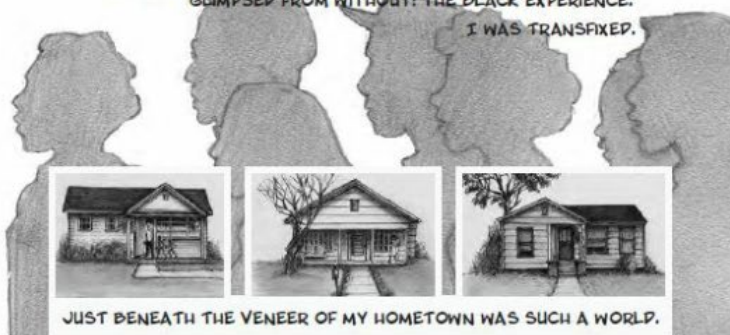
HE WENT AROUND THE SOUTH FOOLING PEOPLE OF BOTH RACES, SUBJECTING HIMSELF TO THE INPIGNITIES AND PERILS FACED BY MEN OF COLOR EVERY DAY.



GET YOUR SORRY BLACK ASS OUT OF MY WAY.

HE ENTERED A WORLD THAT MOST WHITE PEOPLE HAD ONLY GUMPTSED FROM WITHOUT: THE BLACK EXPERIENCE.

I WAS TRANSFIXED.



JUST BENEATH THE VENEER OF MY HOMETOWN WAS SUCH A WORLD.

BLACK PATIENTS USED THE HEALTH CLINIC'S ALLEY ENTRANCE.



INSIDE, A SEPARATE WAITING ROOM.



I SAW THIS WITH MY OWN EYES.

I SAW THAT BLACK MAIDS WERE SUPPOSED TO SIT IN THE BACK SEAT OF THEIR EMPLOYERS' CARS.

I SAW THAT BLACK PEOPLE WERE SUPPOSED TO...

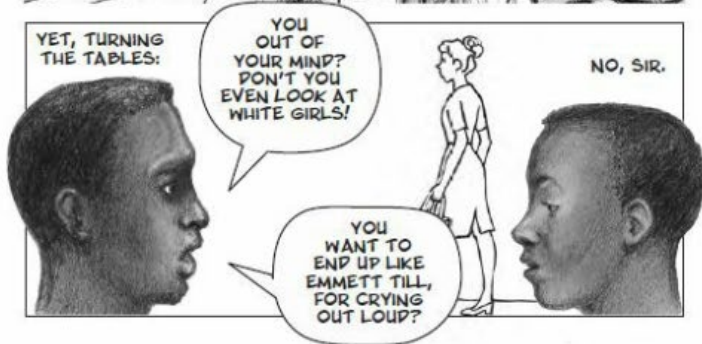


...GO AROUND TO THE BACK POOR OF WHITE PEOPLE'S HOUSES.

I SAW THAT EACH SIDE AFFORDED THE OTHER A DISTINCT INTERPRETATION OF RESPECT.



AND I SAW OTHER INEQUITIES.

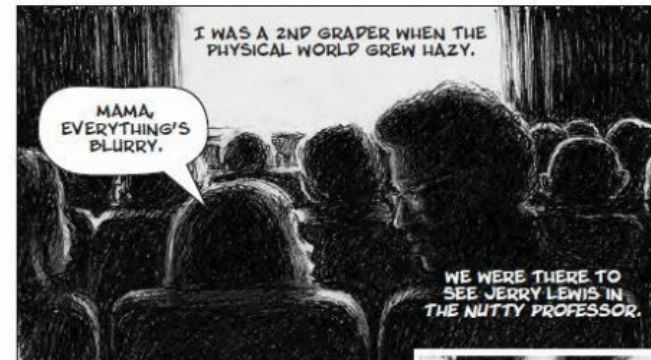
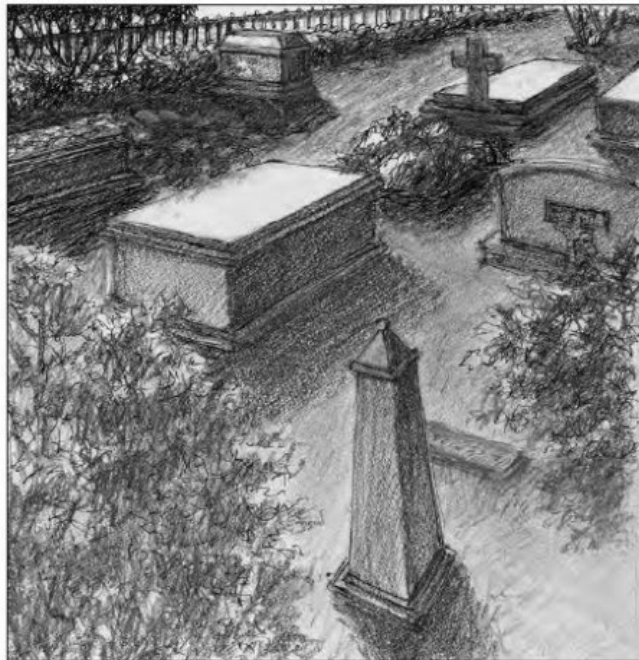


I SAW THAT THESE SEPARATIONS



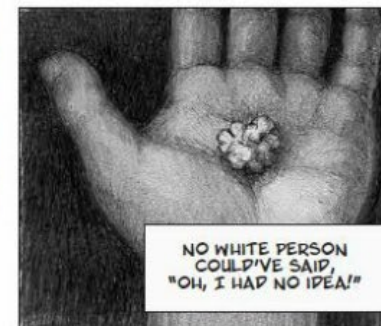
BEGAN IN THE HOSPITAL NURSERY.

AND RAN STRAIGHT TO THE GRAVEYARD.

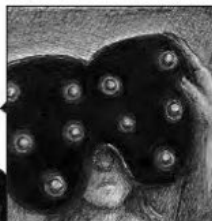


SOMETIMES
PEOPLE IN
THE BALCONY
STOMPED AND
WHISTLED AND
JEERED.

SOMETIMES
THEY RAINED
POPCORN
DOWN ON
OUR HEADS.



F
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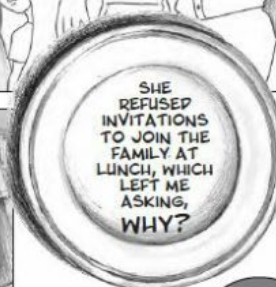
WHAT A DISCOVERY.

THE VISUAL WORLD WAS A THING OF WONDER. I HADN'T SUSPECTED ITS BREADTH AND RICHNESS. BUT NOW I SAW.

STILL, MY EYEGLASSES DIDN'T CORRECT A PARTICULAR BLINDSPOT:

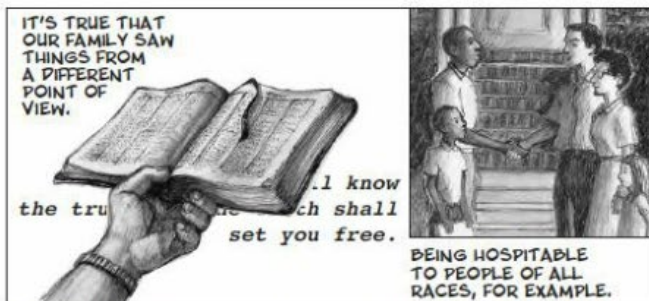
THE FACES OF BLACK PEOPLE LOOKED INTERCHANGEABLE TO ME.

I KNEW ONLY ONE BLACK PERSON IN THOSE DAYS—MRS. JACKSON, THE LADY THAT HELPED OUT WITH IRONING NOW AND THEN.



I COULDN'T BEAR TO SEE HER EATING ALONE, SO I SAT WITH HER.

BUT NEITHER OF US SPOKE.

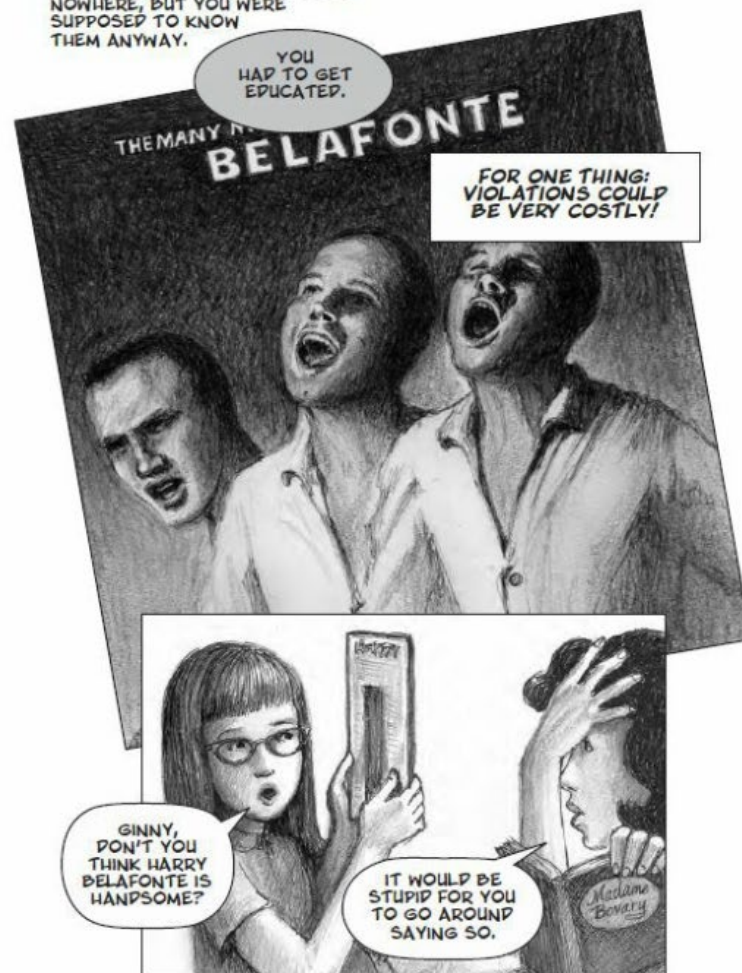


ONCE, A FATHER AND SON CAME TO OUR HOUSE TO SEEK MAMA'S ASSESSMENT OF THE BOY'S ARTISTIC TALENT.



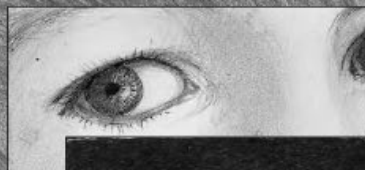
THE RULES THAT GOVERNED RACE RELATIONS WERE WRITTEN DOWN NOWHERE, BUT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO KNOW THEM ANYWAY.

YOU HAD TO GET EDUCATED.



AS MUCH AS I ADMIRER GINNY'S PERANCE, I PARED NOT DISRESPECT THAT RULE.

I DIDN'T LIKE THAT
THESE DIVIDING WALLS EXISTED.
GINNY'S BOOKS AND MUSIC HELPED ME
PEEK OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE.



JOAN BAEZ IN CONCERT

TAKE, FOR
INSTANCE,
THE 4TH SONG
ON SIDE ONE:
"WE SHALL
OVERCOME."



A LIVE
AUDIENCE
AT MILES
COLLEGE
JOINED
BAEZ
IN THE
SINGING.

FOR SOME REASON, I PICTURED
A PARKENED AUDITORIUM FULL OF
PEOPLE HOLDING LIT CANDLES.

I
GOT
SHIVERS
EVERY
TIME.