



OF COURSE, ANYONE CAN
FIGURE OUT THE DANGER
OF MAKING PETS OUT
OF FARM ANIMALS--

ESPECIALLY CHICKENS.



YOU GET EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED TO
AN ANIMAL DESTINED FOR THE
DINNER TABLE, AND YOU'RE ASKING
FOR A BROKEN HEART.

BUT I COULDN'T HELP IT.



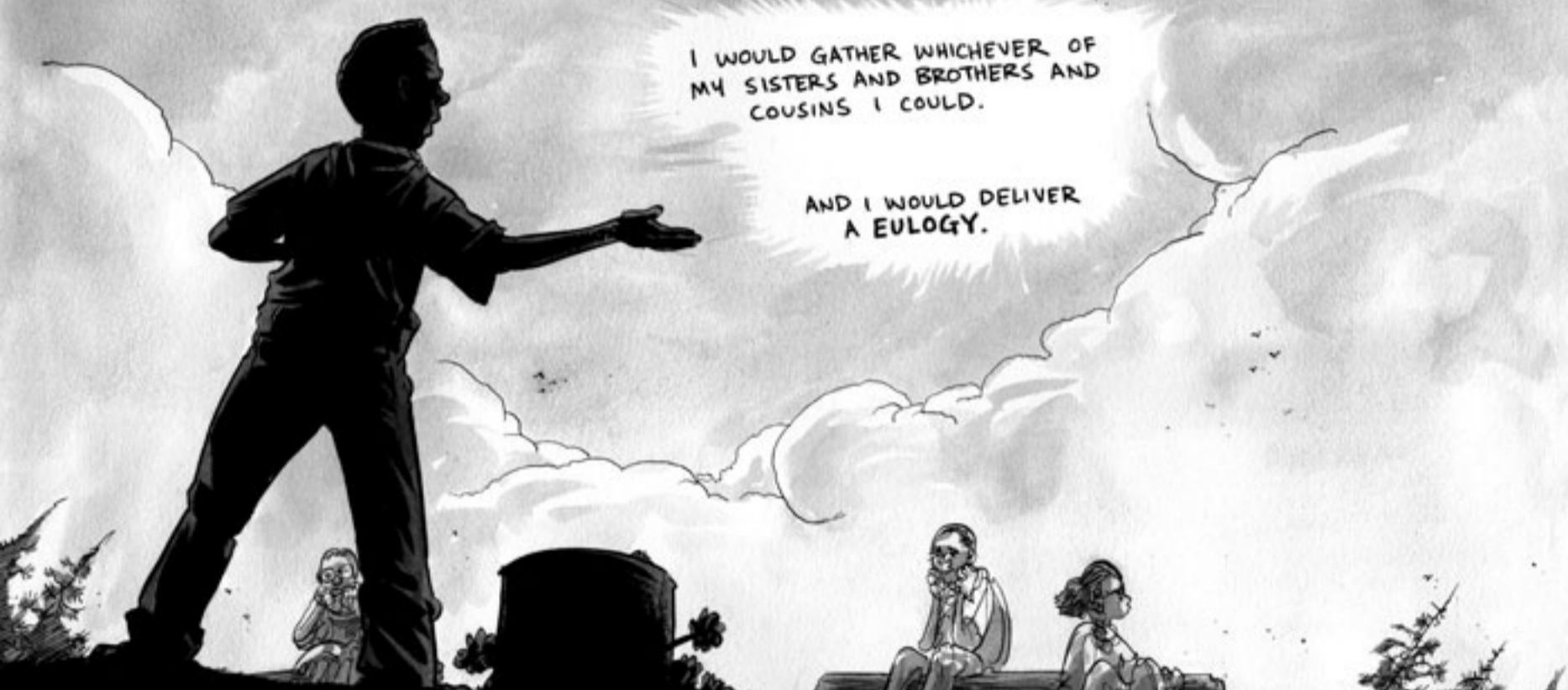
MORE OFTEN THAN I LIKED,
A GROWN HEN OR EVEN A
CHICK WOULD DIE OF
MORE NATURAL CAUSES.



FOR THESE BIRDS,
I WOULD CONDUCT
A FUNERAL.



THIS WAS NOT CHILD'S PLAY.
I WAS GENUINELY GRIEF-
STRICKEN, AND THE SERVICES
WERE PAINSTAKINGLY
PRECISE.



I WOULD GATHER WHICHEVER OF
MY SISTERS AND BROTHERS AND
COUSINS I COULD.

AND I WOULD DELIVER
A EULOGY.



MY PARENTS WOULD WATCH
THE NEWEST TINY COFFIN JOIN
THE NEAT ROW OF SMALL
DIRT-MOUNDED GRAVES,



AND WONDER WHAT KIND
OF SON THEY HAD.

I EVEN WENT THROUGH
A PERIOD OF
PERFORMING BAPTISMS.



I WAS TRULY INTENT
ON SAVING THE LITTLE
BIRDS' SOULS.



ON ONE
OCCASION
I WAS TOO
INTENSE.

I GUESS I MISJUDGED THE TIME.



I WAS SHOCKED.
ABSOLUTELY TERRIFIED.
I HAD TAKEN ONE OF MY
INNOCENT BABIES AND
ACTUALLY KILLED IT.



I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.



IN MY PANIC I HOPED SOMEHOW THE SUN'S HEAT MIGHT DRY ITS FEATHERS AND MAYBE REVIVE IT.



INCREDIBLY, IT DID.

I NEVER FELT MORE GUILT THAN I DID THAT DAY.





ALL THESE ASPECTS OF MY CHICKEN PLAY TICKLED MY PARENTS AT FIRST, BUT THEIR AMUSEMENT VANISHED AS I BEGAN SERIOUSLY PROTESTING THEIR OWN TREATMENT OF THE BIRDS.

FROM TIME TO TIME, THEY WOULD HAVE NO CASH TO PAY THE ROLLING STONE MAN FOR SOME SORELY-NEEDED SUGAR OR FLOUR, SO THEY WOULD OFFER A BIRD IN BARTER INSTEAD.

ONE OF MY CHICKENS.



I'D CRY, REFUSE TO
SPEAK TO THEM FOR
THE REST OF THE DAY--
EVEN SKIP THAT
EVENING'S MEAL.



WORSE, THOUGH, WAS
WATCHING MY MOTHER OR FATHER
KILL ONE OF THE CHICKENS FOR
A SPECIAL SUNDAY DINNER.



THEY WOULD EITHER BREAK
ITS NECK WITH THEIR HANDS,



SPINNING IT AROUND
UNTIL THE BONE
SNAPPED



OR SIMPLY CHOP
THE HEAD OFF.

THEY WOULD THEN DRAIN THE BLOOD FROM ITS BODY AND DIP IT IN BOILING WATER, SCALDING IT TO LOOSEN ITS FEATHERS FOR PLUCKING.

I WAS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN AT THOSE FAMILY MEALS.

so you stopped raising chickens because it was too hard to see them be killed?

NO--

THE DEATH OF THOSE CHICKENS WAS JUST A PART OF LIFE.

BUT EVENTUALLY, I BEGAN SPENDING MORE TIME DOING SCHOOLWORK, STUDYING, AND MY EYES BEGAN OPENING TO THE WORLD AROUND ME.

but--

why did you need to study more?

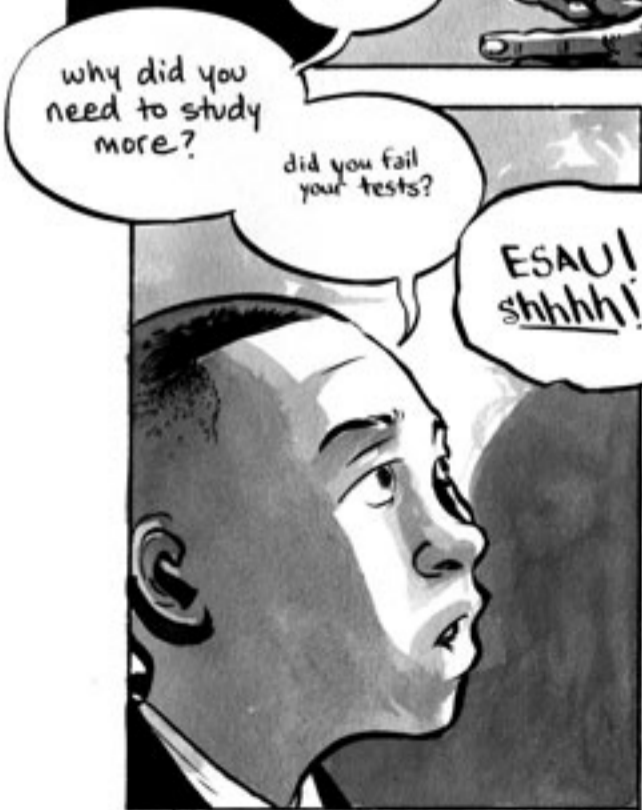
did you fail your tests?

ESAU!
shhhh!


I DID OKAY. I WASN'T THE BEST.

what?!


BUT I WORKED VERY HARD, AND MY TEACHERS NOTICED.




THE THING IS, THERE WASN'T MUCH OF A CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT WHEN I FIRST GOT INVOLVED. I WANTED TO WORK AT SOMETHING, BUT GROWING UP IN RURAL ALABAMA, MY PARENTS KNEW IT COULD BE DANGEROUS TO MAKE ANY WAVES.



stay out of trouble.



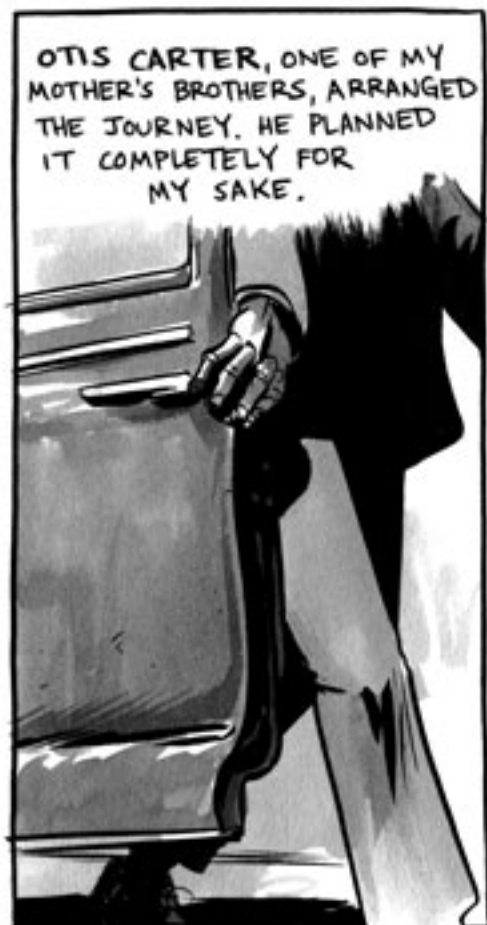
don't get in white people's way.




BUT OTHER MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY HELPED OPEN MY EYES.



IN THE SUMMER OF 1951, I TOOK MY FIRST TRIP NORTH.



OTIS CARTER, ONE OF MY MOTHER'S BROTHERS, ARRANGED THE JOURNEY. HE PLANNED IT COMPLETELY FOR MY SAKE.



HE LIVED IN DOTHAN, ABOUT SIXTY MILES SOUTH OF US, WHERE HE WAS A TEACHER AND A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL.



I WAS SO SERIOUS, VERY EARNEST, STILL SERMONIZING WITH MY CHICKENS, STILL PROTESTING WHEN THAT WHITE MEAT WENT ON THE TABLE.

I WORE A TIE OFTEN, AND SOME OF THE GROWNUPS TEASED ME ABOUT THAT, TELLING ME I DRESSED LIKE A PREACHER.

UNCLE OTIS HAD ALWAYS TAKEN A SPECIAL INTEREST IN ME, ESPECIALLY AS I BEGAN TO GROW AND STAND OUT A LITTLE BIT--

NOT JUST WITH MY DEVOTION TO SCHOOLWORK, BUT WITH THE WAY I GENERALLY ACTED.



I KNOW NOW THAT UNCLE OTIS SAW SOMETHING IN ME THAT I HADN'T YET SEEN.



THAT IS WHY WE TOOK OUR TRIP IN JUNE OF '51.

THERE WOULD BE NO RESTAURANTS FOR US TO STOP AT UNTIL WE WERE WELL OUT OF THE SOUTH,

SO WE CARRIED OUR RESTAURANT RIGHT IN THE CAR WITH US.

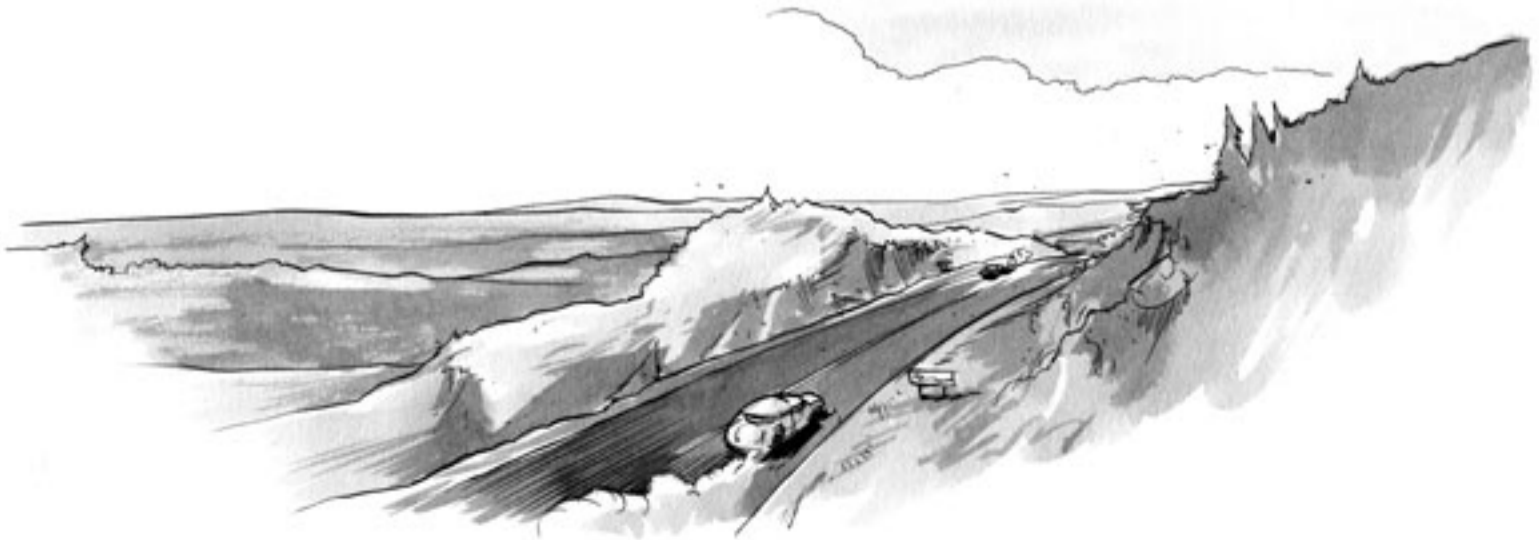
STOPPING FOR GAS AND BATHROOM BREAKS TOOK CAREFUL PLANNING.

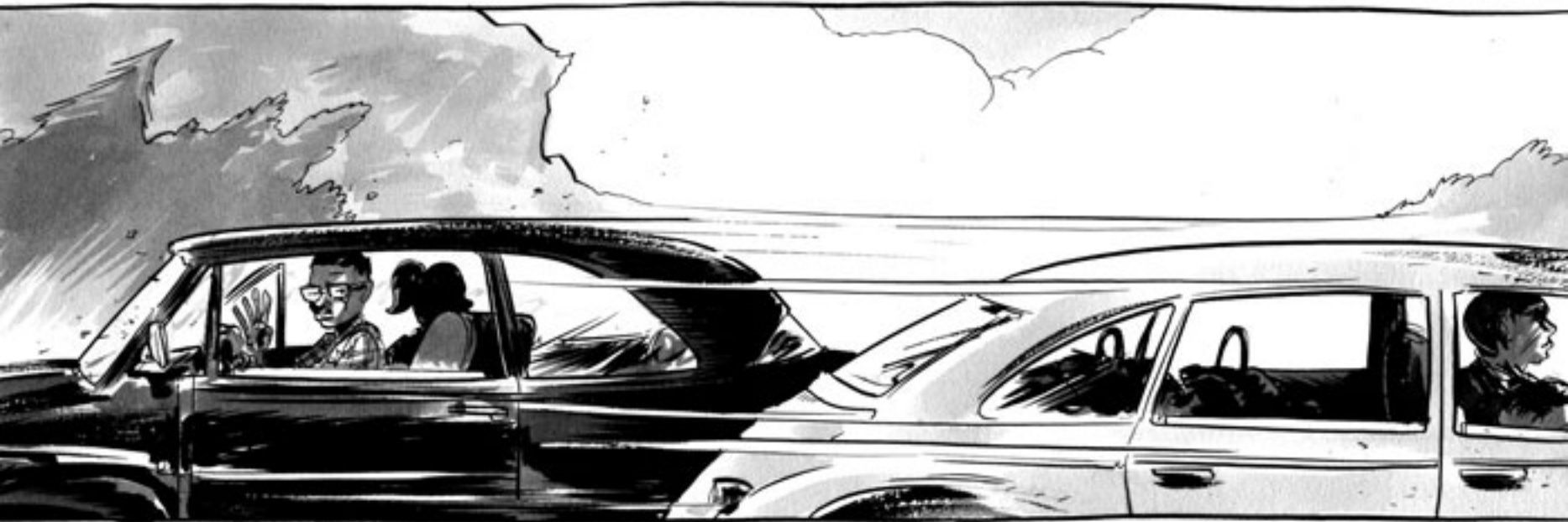
UNCLE OTIS HAD MADE THIS TRIP BEFORE, AND HE KNEW WHICH PLACES

ALONG THE WAY OFFERED "COLORED" BATHROOMS --



AND WHICH WERE SAFER TO JUST PASS ON BY.





ALABAMA.

TENNESSEE.

KENTUCKY.

THESE WERE THE STATES WE
HAD TO BE CAREFUL IN AS WE
MADE OUR WAY NORTH.

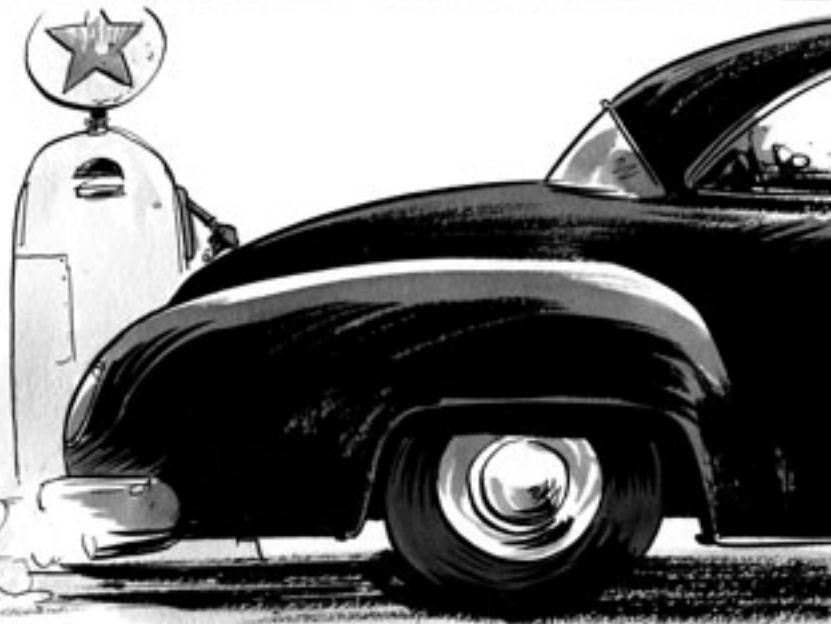


BLACK DRIVERS WE PASSED GOING THE OTHER DIRECTION,



FROM NORTH TO SOUTH,

FACED AN ADDED DANGER,
THEIR LICENSE PLATES MAKING
THEM VISIBLE TARGETS.



SOMETIMES THEY HAD
TO FACE WORSE...



What are them
yankee niggers
doing with a car
like that?





IT WASN'T UNTIL WE
GOT INTO OHIO



THAT I COULD FEEL
UNCLE OTIS RELAX--



AND SO I RELAXED, TOO.