

ISOLATION AND OTHER STORIES

Excerpt from "Choosing Sides"

Old Man Woods drank heavily and had one glass eye. A long time ago, he'd lost his real eye to diabetes and Old Crow. He was a little man with thick, curly black hair and a squared-off mustache that stopped right at the corners of his mouth. He was sixty years old, but his cinnamon-colored skin was barely wrinkled, even with all his drinking. He had a heavy West Indian accent, and my mother claimed that his Caribbean roots had kept all that drink from shrivelin' him up like a dried prune.

Mr. Woods taught the First Baptist Church senior teen's Sunday school class in Belmont, Ohio—10:00 a.m. sharp. You could tell it was his proudest accomplishment in life. Alcoholism had destroyed a lot of others. Early every Sunday morning, accompanied by two spotlessly scrubbed children and a wife twice his size, Mr. Woods would pull into the church parking lot in the space right next to the church's front steps, and unload his family—all dressed in their Sunday best.

Miz Woods had a husky alto voice and sang in the senior adult choir. She liked to belt out "Cross Over the Bridge" solo and throw her fists into the air. Mr. Woods loved it. He'd listen to her and his foot would start tapping. You could almost see him glow. His one good eye would tear up and he'd swell with pride. If you were close enough you could hear him hum along, and when she came to the part about leaving your troubles behind you and Jesus finding you, he'd chime in along with her until the end of the hymn.

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