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Stranger

Walter Dean Myers

You couldn't put much past Cassie Holliday. Girl got straight Bs in school in District 5. You didn't get no straight Bs in District 5 unless you had some smarts. Everybody said Cassie was smart and was going to make something of herself.

Things didn't go the way she thought they was supposed to, though. What she thought was, she was going to finish school and get her a good job and get on with it. That's what she thought, but everything was harder than it was supposed to be and nobody seemed to care. Maybe it was the not caring that made it hurt so much. Or maybe it was when her mother said she couldn't cope no more and Cassie had to make it on her own without even a piece of clue as how to do it. Anyway, she took a little something to ease things. Not much at first and not all the time. But then it took more just to stop the hurt. And then it took more and more, and finally it was taking

too much. It was taking pieces of her clear away and Cassie knew it.

She was tired when she first saw the stranger, but she knew what she seen. That morning she had gone downtown to the employment agency to look for a job. She hadn't been sitting around all the time before, doing nothing, either. What she had been doing was looking for a job when she could, when her knee wasn't feeling so bad. She hadn't got anything but it wasn't because she wasn't looking.

What made Cassie decide to go downtown and look for a job is that she wanted to get herself a new beginning. She had done that before, look for a new beginning, and it hadn't worked, but she still was trying. But on the night before she went downtown she had stopped over to the Africa House to see if they had any applications for the G.E.D. See, Cassie was getting herself together. Dropping out of high school wasn't a big thing, or at least it wasn't a big thing at the time she did it. But when she applied for a job and people kept asking her about high school, it got to be a drag. Cassie wasn't going to let no little thing like that stop her.

She got the application and was sitting on a bench in that little park across from the Africa House when this guy come up to her and ask her if she in the life.

"What life you talking about?" Cassie asked. This guy looked like a bum. His clothes is so dirty they got a shine on them. He wearing skips on his feet and his breath stunk.

"Sweet as you look I thought you might be looking for some extra cash," the man said. "How old are you?"

He pull some one-dollar bills out his pocket, which was as dirty as he was, and started counting them out.

"I'm eighteen and I don't know what you talking about!" Cassie said, putting her age up a year and loud talking the guy. "And you better get your *junty* self out my face!"

Cassie jumped up from the bench and started fooling down the street. Here she was getting herself together and had to deal with this lowlife. She started on uptown, getting madder and madder as she went. Malcolm X Boulevard was just crawling with people because it was too hot to be in no house without some serious AC. People was sitting on folding chairs or boxes or just standing around having them a beer or maybe a soft-shell crab sandwich, whatever they was selling on the street or you could bring out your house.

That was what made her sick. She was walking too fast in too much heat in too many smells and sounds coming out boom boxes and people fighting and laughing and being themselves on the hot streets. Cassie was feeling terrible and knew she needed something to get herself together.

The thing was that sometimes things went good and sometimes things went wrong and sometimes you just needed you something to get you through the night. Cassie was needing something bad.

She needed something but that was all right, she told herself, because she was getting herself together. That's why she was going for her G.E.D. She walked a little faster, walking past some kids jumping rope and some other little long-headed black boys playing basketball and

who should have had their tails in bed a long time ago no matter how hot it was.

She stopped and got a little something. It made her tired to deal with the brother she bought the stuff from, or maybe it didn't make her tired but just made her sicker for the minute. Cassie thought that since she knew she was going to feel better she wasn't fighting the sick feeling. That's all there was to it. She was going to feel better and then she was going to go home and cop some dream time and then get it together in the morning. Anyway, when she got home she was feeling all right in a way and bad in another way. She was telling herself that she shouldn't have made herself feel better, she should have gone on and been sick and laid up in the room and puked and moaned and whatever else she was going to do and start off in the morning like it was a new day.

It didn't matter. That's what she figured out. It didn't matter because when the sun came beaming up over the warehouse which faced her apartment it was a new day and a new beginning. That's what it was.

Cassie walked up the three flights to her apartment and declared that one thing she was going to do, as God was her Secret Judge, was to move out the rat hole she was living in and stop paying rent to the mealy-mouth yellow Negro who was probably just a front anyway.

She walked into the house, put both locks and the chain on the door, and started toward her bedroom. That's when she passed the mirror and saw the stranger.

It shocked her at first, made her insides kind of jump and shake, and she couldn't settle down. She went into

the bedroom, turned on the radio as loud as it would go on, and laid down across the bed.

If it was burglars, Cassie thought, they would know she was home. She had left her bag out on the table and they could take that if they wanted. But it didn't have to be burglars, Cassie knew. The girl in the mirror looked something like her, had her hair combed back from her face the way Cassie combed her hair back. But that's where it ended. Cassie had calm eyes and looked good. The girl she had seen was thin and desperate-looking. Cassie wondered if she was on crack. She changed the radio station, switching it from station to station so they would know she was in the house.

She went over and closed the bedroom door to give them a chance to leave, whoever they was.

What she wanted to do, what she really wanted to do, was to move out right then and there. Pack a bag and get into the wind.

She jumped up and ran to the bedroom door and flung it open.

"Get out of here! Get out of here!" she screamed.

This time she slammed the door shut and went back to the bed. That was a bad move. She should have thought it through. Now they knew she was in there and didn't have no man with her to kick their butts. They could come in and mess with her. But a girl wouldn't want to mess with her. Maybe a man would but a girl wouldn't want to mess with her.

She sat on the edge of the bed, her head forward over her brown knees, her breath coming in shallow gasps. She listened, turning her head slightly. Did she

hear the front door close? She edged toward the bedroom door and listened. Nothing. She cracked the door and looked down the hallway. It was empty. She closed the door and sat back down again. It was hard to live alone.

Cassie thought about her mother, wondering what she was doing. When she thought about her mother she thought about the woman laughing. Her mother had the kind of laugh that was sweet and pure and tinkly. Her laugh would start low and fly up and end with a note that seemed to go back inside her, as if the laugh was done and she was withdrawing the joy of it. When Cassie was a little girl and they lived in Brooklyn, she used to try to play her mother's laugh on the old upright piano somebody had painted green with gold trim.

"Mama, laugh," she would say. And then, even before her mother could laugh, Cassie would laugh herself. But still she would try to get those notes, try to play them on the piano, and her mother would shake her head and say, "Girl, you some kind of crazy!"

That was so long ago. Or maybe it was just so long ago that her mother had laughed, hadn't looked at her and wondered aloud why Jesus was letting Cassie go through the trials she was going through.

Now her mother always had something to say, always had to fix her mouth about something that Cassie knew she could take care of if she just had enough time. She didn't know why her mother just didn't understand. God knows she had explained it to her enough times.

Her stomach growled and cramped. She knew she

was going to get sick again. They had messed up her feeling all right. They had just messed that up.

She didn't have any more money. No, she had a few dollars. She needed that to get downtown and look for a job. But that was tomorrow. She was sick now.

She opened the bedroom door and walked out quiet as she could. She couldn't hardly breathe she was so scared when she passed the mirror. She looked over to her left where the girl had to be standing to get her reflection in the mirror. Nothing. They had gone.

In the hallway she ran to the stairs and down them as fast as possible. When she got out to the street her whole body was shaking. If whoever was in her apartment was still in there, they would have to leave because they didn't know if she was coming back with the cops or what she was going to do.

On the street she looked in her handkerchief and saw that she had twenty dollars. She was feeling real bad now and needed something.

That's how her life was going. Her being sick and needing to get well. She wasn't the kind that stayed sick, like with Big C or AIDS or nothing like that. It was always a little sickness, something she had to get over for a few minutes, or for a few hours, sometimes the whole day. That's the way it was.

Her mouth was dry by the time Cassie got something to take the edge off her sickness. She bought a bottle of soda to get her stomach calm before she went upstairs. She wasn't looking for no trouble but she wasn't going to just fold up and die, either. That wasn't the way she was. She went on up the stairs like she owned them.

Like she owned them and didn't care about nothing or nobody. That's what you have to do sometime.

She stomped into the bedroom and a little fear came into her but she went right to the bed and laid down. She didn't have a dream, not a real dream, but some pictures that came into her mind as she lay in the darkness that made her feel good.

The first picture was of her standing on the stage at Bethel Church of God in Christ. Her mother had taken the picture and she had the image of it mingled with the feeling of it. Cassie's face had been round then and there was a sweet smile on her face, which sometimes she tried to put on, but it never worked. Smiling didn't feel the same way it used to. Cassie thought that was because she wasn't a girl anymore. She was a woman now.

The next picture was of her standing with Coley, her first boyfriend. Coley was jive but he was sweet. He had lost a tooth playing basketball and always kept his mouth shut when he smiled. He looked funny. He was jive, but sweet.

When she woke up in the morning, she knew it was the new beginning she had been waiting for. She checked out what money she had and then looked in the refrigerator to see what she had to eat.

There were two eggs, an onion, and four slices of cheese wrapped in plastic. It didn't do nothing for her so she skipped breakfast and got herself ready to go for a job.

She was in a hurry, looking around the house grabbing what she could to put on, even putting on her lip gloss without looking into the mirror. She grabbed some toilet paper, took off the excess gloss, and started off. She

had put on her dark skirt, the one that didn't look too bold in case she came across an office job.

At the door she didn't know what to do. Should she lock the door and leave that girl in there or leave it open? She didn't see a guy but that didn't make a difference. There could have been one.

Cassie went down the stairs and into the lobby. The mailman had the boxes open and Mrs. Lucas, who lived on the top floor, was standing there waiting for him to finish distributing the mail.

"Good morning, Mrs. Lucas," Cassie said.

Mrs. Lucas didn't say nothing, just looked at her. Cassie didn't know what was wrong with her. Cassie had run errands for Mrs. Lucas plenty of times and now she wasn't even speaking. Maybe she was getting senile or something.

"Good morning, Mrs. Lucas," Cassie said, raising her voice. "How you doing?"

Mrs. Lucas straightened up and squinted right at her. "Girl, you sure have gone down," the older woman said.

"You got to do something with yourself."

"I know what you mean," Cassie said. "I think I got a touch of the flu."

"You know you're from a good family," Mrs. Lucas went on.

"You sure right about that," Cassie said as she went out the door.

It's not even me she's talking about, Cassie thought. It's that girl up there in my apartment. She favor me some and Mrs. Lucas probably saw her on my floor.

Cassie wondered if the strange girl was homeless. As

she walked down the street past Unity Funeral Home she was shaking her head. She had heard what some homeless girls had to do to get money. An old man sat near the curb on a folding chair reading his Bible. Cassie nodded to him and he nodded back.

The job place was on Fourteenth Street and Cassie got to it at ten-thirty.

"We don't have anything right now." The man behind the desk wore rimless glasses. "You get down here the first thing in the morning I'll see if I can find you something."

Disgusted. That's what Cassie felt. It was the nineteenth and her rent was already a month past due. She walked over and got the number 3 train uptown and she was beginning to feel sick. She needed to get home and lie down for a while and decided to do just that. Coming uptown, between 96th Street and 116th Street she had made a decision. What she was going to do was just to ignore the girl if she saw her again.

Jeanie Tate was standing at the bus stop and Cassie stopped to say hello.

"How you doing, girlfriend?" Jeanie was wearing dark brown slacks and a soft beige sweater.

"I'm getting by," Cassie said.

"You still going to school?"

"Yeah, you know how that is," Cassie said. She didn't know why she was lying to Jeanie, because Jeanie wasn't all that much.

"Well, that's good," Jeanie said. "I'm thinking about going to community college next fall."

"Get on with your bad self!" Cassie said. The crosstown bus stopped and Jeanie stepped aside to let people off.

"You take care of yourself," Jeanie said over her shoulder as she got on the bus.

Cassie was anxious to get home but she thought she'd stop and tell Barry that she had seen Jeanie. Barry had a cast eye so when one eye was looking dead at you the other one was a little off. He was good-looking, though. If he wasn't so old, almost thirty or so, she would have given him a play herself. But Barry had always been sweet on Jeanie, even when they were little and going to grade school.

Barry hung in Terry's, a shoeshine parlor that sold newspapers, gum, candy, and other little stuff.

"Barry, guess who I just saw?"

"What's happening?" Barry was sitting up on the shine stand like it was his throne. "And who you seen?"

"Jeanie Tate," Cassie said. "She was looking good, too."

Barry smiled. He had a tooth that was outlined in gold. "You know she getting married?"

"Get out of here!"

"Some dude from Brooklyn," Barry said. "Where you see her?"

"At the bus stop," Cassie said. "She was probably just visiting her mother. I thought she had come to see you."

"No, she didn't come to see me," Barry said. "I ain't got time for married ladies."

"Yeah, you stay busy," Cassie said.

"You needing something?"

"I shouldn't... I had to fight that number three train in all this heat," Cassie shook her head. "You don't know how aggravated I am."

"Then you need a pick-me-up," Barry said. "I got a little something in the back room."

What Cassie thought was that if she stayed out of the apartment until she was really tired it would be easier for her to get to sleep. She wanted to tease Barry about Jeannie some more because she knew he was still sweet on her, even though he was trying to nonchalant the whole deal. That's the way Barry was, always trying to nonchalant things.

Cassie got tired like she knew she would if she hung out all day and was just about falling asleep when she got to her apartment. She checked the door and it was open.

She went in and crossed right to the refrigerator to see if the girl had eaten her food. She hadn't and Cassie made herself an omelette. It was the kind her mother used to make before she had to move out and get her own place. Her mother was okay but she kept getting into Cassie's business, accusing her of things like she didn't have any sense.

Cassie washed the pan and the dish, making sure she made a lot of noise so if the girl was still there she would know Cassie wasn't afraid. Once she thought she heard her, but when she listened close she didn't hear anything more. She thought about Barry. She really didn't like him. He was the kind of guy that used girls. That's what he really wanted that back room for, so he could mess around with girls. Some people said he freebased back there, but Cassie hadn't seen anything he could freebase with.

She put the dish and pan away and the feeling of tiredness came down over her like somebody was

pouring water over her head and let it run down on her shoulders. She started for the bedroom and stopped in the hallway mirror.

There she was! Cassie whirled around but she was gone. In her heart she knew what was going to go down next. The girl was messing with her! When she turned around again she was going to show up again, standing behind her so Cassie could see her in the mirror.

Ignore her. Cassie took a breath. She took it in slow and deep and released the tension from her clenched fists. Then she turned back to the mirror. She was right. There she was leaning back against the wall. Cassie pretended she was looking at the reflection of the crucifix on the wall, but kept taking glances toward the stranger. She was trying to conceal herself, pressing against the doorjamb, her face half in shadow. A thin hand ran itself through her uncombed hair. The blouse was buttoned wrong, making her look like something thrown away. Cassie was relieved she didn't look violent as she turned and walked deliberately to the bedroom. She fell across the bed and pulled the top of the spread over her head. She wanted to cut out the girl's image and the thought of her.

Cassie lay on the bed for a long time, wishing and hoping for sleep, trying to will herself through the night. Outside it was raining and the hiss of tires sounded like brushes on cymbals in the heavy darkness. The blind moved gently against the window, its rhythm clashing with the blare of the radio down the street. Cassie was almost there, almost past the day's tiredness, almost past the day's unbearable weight, when she heard the sound.

She tensed, pulling her mind back to the present, back to awareness. She listened to see if she could hear it again. There. There it was. Cassie listened. There were the soft sounds of muffled sobbing. The girl was crying.

Cassie pulled the cover from the foot of the bed and balled it up in front of her mouth. If she could make it through the night she would face it in the morning. For the time being it was just too much.

Walter Dean Myers

Walter Dean Myers has published more than thirty novels for young adults, along with several nonfiction books and a handful of picture books, including *Brown Angels*. The list of awards these books have received is longer than the space available here. Among the most important awards Myers's books have received are the following. Seven books, including *It Ain't All for Nothin'*, *The Legend of Tariq*, and *The Glory Field*, have been named Best Books for Young Adults by the American Library Association, and *Scorpions* was one of the ALA's 100 Best of the Best Books for Young Adults published between 1967 and 1992. *Scorpions* was also a Newbery Honor Book, as was *Somewhere in the Dartness*. That book, along with *Malcolm X. By Any Means Necessary*, was a Coretta Scott King Honor Book, as well as a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book. Three of Myers's novels—*Won't Know Till I Get There*, *The Outside Shot*, and *Fallen Angels*—have been *Parents' Choice* Award winners. And *Fallen Angels*, along with *The Young Landlords*, *Motown and Didi*, and *Now Is Your Time*, received the Coretta Scott King Award.

In addition to those specific awards, Myers has been the recipient of the prestigious Margaret A. Edwards

Award for his lifetime writing achievements, as well as the ALAN Award for his outstanding contributions to young adult literature.

Fallen Angels, an action-packed story of two young African American soldiers fighting in Vietnam, and *Some-where in the Darkness*, a poignant story about the relationship between a teenage boy and his convict father on a journey to understanding, are two of Walter Dean Myers's most popular novels, along with *Scorpions*, an intimate examination of the life of a young man caught up in the violence of a Harlem neighborhood gang. In his most recent novel, *Stam!*, Myers examines the life of an inner-city high-school basketball player who is trying to make something of his life.

How Do I Get Myself
Out of This?

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What made Cassie decide to go downtown and look for a job is that she wanted to get herself a new beginning. She had done that before, look for a new beginning, and it hadn't worked, but she still was trying. But on the night before she went downtown she had stopped over to the Africa House to see if they had any applications for the G.E.D. See, Cassie was getting herself together. Dropping out of high school wasn't a big thing, or at least it wasn't a big thing at the time she did it. But when she applied for a job and people kept asking her about high school, it got to be a drag. Cassie wasn't going to let no little thing like that stop her.

She got the application and was sitting on a bench in that little park across from the Africa House when this guy come up to her and ask her if she in the life. "What life you talking about?" Cassie asked. This guy looked like a bum. His clothes is so dirty they got a shine on them. He wearing slaps on his feet and his breath stunk.

"Sweet as you look I thought you might be looking for some extra cash," the man said. "How old are you?"

He pull some one-dollar bills out his pocket, which was dirty as he was, and started counting them out. "I'm eighteen and I don't know what you talking about!" Cassie said, putting her age up a year and loud talking the guy. "And you better get your funky self out my face!"

Cassie jumped up from the bench and started footing down the street. Here she was getting herself together and had to deal with this lowlife. She started on uptown, getting madder and madder as she went. Malcolm X Boulevard was just crawling with people because it was too hot to be in no house without some serious AC. People was sitting on folding chairs or boxes or just standing around having them a beer or maybe a soft-shell crab sandwich, whatever they was selling on the street or you could bring out your house.

That was what made her sick. She was walking too fast in too much heat in too many smells and sounds coming out boom boxes and people fighting and laughing and being themselves on the hot streets. Cassie was feeling terrible and knew she needed something to get herself together.

The thing was that sometimes things went good and sometimes things went wrong and sometimes you just needed you something to get you through the night. Cassie was needing something bad. A machine calling. She needed something but that was all right, she told herself, because she was getting herself together. That's why she was going for her G.E.D. She walked a little faster, walking past some kids jumping rope and some other little long-headed black boys playing basketball and

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She stomped into the bedroom and a little fear came into her but she went right to the bed and laid down. She didn't have a dream, not a real dream, but some pictures that came into her mind as she lay in the darkness that made her feel good.

The first picture was of her standing on the stage at Bethel Church of God in Christ. Her mother had taken the picture and she had the image of it mingled with the feeling of it. Cassie's face had been round then and there was a sweet smile on her face, which sometimes she tried to put on, but it never worked. Smiling didn't feel the same way it used to. Cassie thought that was because she wasn't a girl anymore. She was a woman now.

The next picture was of her standing with Coley, her first boyfriend. Coley was jive but he was sweet. He had lost a tooth playing basketball and always kept his mouth shut when he smiled. He looked funny. He was jive, but sweet.

When she woke up in the morning, she knew it was the new beginning she had been waiting for. She checked out what money she had and then looked in the refrigerator to see what she had to eat.

There were two eggs, an onion, and four slices of cheese wrapped in plastic. It didn't do nothing for her so she skipped breakfast and got herself ready to go for a job.

She was in a hurry, looking around the house grabbing what she could to put on, even putting on her lip gloss without looking into the mirror. She grabbed some toilet paper, took off the excess gloss, and started off. She

had put on her dark skirt, the one that didn't look too bold in case she came across an office job.

At the door she didn't know what to do. Should she lock the door and leave that girl in there or leave it open? She didn't see a guy but that didn't make a difference. There could have been one.

Cassie went down the stairs and into the lobby. The mailman had the boxes open and Mrs. Lucas, who lived on the top floor, was standing there waiting for him to finish distributing the mail.

"Good morning, Mrs. Lucas," Cassie said.

Mrs. Lucas didn't say nothing, just looked at her. Cassie didn't know what was wrong with her. Cassie had run errands for Mrs. Lucas plenty of times and now she wasn't even speaking. Maybe she was getting senile or something.

"Good morning, Mrs. Lucas," Cassie said, raising her voice. "How you doing?"

Mrs. Lucas straightened up and squinted right at her. "Girl, you sure have gone down," the older woman said.

"You got to do something with yourself."

"I know what you mean," Cassie said. "I think I got a touch of the flu."

"You know you're from a good family," Mrs. Lucas went on.

"You sure right about that," Cassie said as she went out the door.

It's not even me she's talking about, Cassie thought. It's that girl up there in my apartment. She favor me some and Mrs. Lucas probably saw her on my floor.

Cassie wondered if the strange girl was homeless. As

she walked down the street past Unity Funeral Home she was shaking her head. She had heard what some homeless girls had to do to get money. An old man sat near the curb on a folding chair reading his Bible. Cassie nodded to him and he nodded back.

The job place was on Fourteenth Street and Cassie got to it at ten-thirty.

"We don't have anything right now." The man behind the desk wore rimless glasses. "You get down here the first thing in the morning I'll see if I can find you something."

Disgusted, that's what Cassie felt. It was the nineteenth and her rent was already a month past due. She walked over and got the number 3 train uptown and she was beginning to feel sick. She needed to get home and lie down for a while and decided to do just that. Coming uptown, between 96th Street and 116th Street she had made a decision. What she was going to do was just to ignore the girl if she saw her again.

Jeanie Tate was standing at the bus stop and Cassie stopped to say hello.

"How you doing, girlfriend?" Jeanie was wearing dark brown slacks and a soft beige sweater.

"I'm getting by," Cassie said.

"You still going to school?"

"Yeah, you know how that is," Cassie said. She didn't know why she was lying to Jeanie, because Jeanie wasn't all that much.

"Well, that's good," Jeanie said. "I'm thinking about going to community college next fall."

"Get on with your bad self!" Cassie said. The Crosstown bus stopped and Jeanie stepped aside to let people off.

"You take care of yourself," Jeanie said over her shoulder as she got on the bus.

Cassie was anxious to get home but she thought she'd stop and tell Barry that she had seen Jeanie. Barry had a cast eye so when one eye was looking dead at you the other one was a little off. He was good-looking, though. If he wasn't so old, almost thirty or so, she would have given him a play herself. But Barry had always been sweet on Jeanie, even when they were little and going to grade school.

Barry hung in Terry's, a shoeshine parlor that sold newspapers, gum, candy, and other little stuff.

"Barry, guess who I just saw?"

"What's happening?" Barry was sitting up on the shine stand like it was his throne. "And who you seen?"

"Jeanie Tate," Cassie said. "She was looking good, too."

Barry smiled. He had a tooth that was outlined in gold. "You know she getting married?"

"Get out of here!"

"Some dude from Brooklyn," Barry said. "Where you see her?"

"At the bus stop," Cassie said. "She was probably just visiting her mother. I thought she had come to see you."

"No, she didn't come to see me," Barry said. "I ain't got time for married ladies."

"Yeah, you stay busy," Cassie said.

"You needing something?"

"I shouldn't... I had to fight that number three train in all this heat," Cassie shook her head. "You don't know how aggravated I am."

"Then you need a pick-me-up," Barry said. "I got a little something in the back room."

What Cassie thought was that if she stayed out of the apartment until she was really tired it would be easier for her to get to sleep. She wanted to tease Barry about Jeanne some more because she knew he was still sweet on her, even though he was trying to nonchalant the whole deal. That's the way Barry was, always trying to nonchalant things.

Cassie got tired like she knew she would if she hung out all day and was just about falling asleep when she got to her apartment. She checked the door and it was open.

She went in and crossed right to the refrigerator to see if the girl had eaten her food. She hadn't and Cassie made herself an omelette. It was the kind her mother used to make before she had to move out and get her own place. Her mother was okay but she kept getting into Cassie's business, accusing her of things like she didn't have any sense.

Cassie washed the pan and the dish, making sure she made a lot of noise so if the girl was still there she would know Cassie wasn't afraid. Once she thought she heard her, but when she listened close she didn't hear anything more. She thought about Barry. She really didn't like him. He was the kind of guy that used girls. That's what he really wanted that back room for, so he could mess around with girls. Some people said he free-based back there, but Cassie hadn't seen anything he could freebase with.

She put the dish and pan away and the feeling of tiredness came down over her like somebody was

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pouring water over her head and let it run down on her shoulders. She started for the bedroom and stopped in the hallway mirror.

There she was! Cassie whirled around but she was gone. In her heart she knew what was going to go down next. The girl was messing with her! When she turned around again she was going to show up again, standing behind her so Cassie could see her in the mirror.

Ignore her. Cassie took a breath. She took it in slow and deep and released the tension from her clenched fists. Then she turned back to the mirror. She was right. There she was leaning back against the wall. Cassie pretended she was looking at the reflection of the crucifix on the wall, but kept taking glances toward the stranger. She was trying to conceal herself, pressing against the doorjamb, her face half in shadow. A thin hand ran itself through her uncombed hair. The blouse was buttoned wrong, making her look like something thrown away. Cassie was relieved she didn't look violent as she turned and walked deliberately to the bedroom. She fell across the bed and pulled the top of the spread over her head. She wanted to cut out the girl's image and the thought of her.

Cassie lay on the bed for a long time, wishing and hoping for sleep, trying to will herself through the night. Outside it was raining and the hiss of tires sounded like brushes on cymbals in the heavy darkness. The blind moved gently against the window, its rhythm clashing with the blare of the radio down the street. Cassie was almost there, almost past the day's tiredness, almost past the day's unbearable weight, when she heard the sound.

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She tensed, pulling her mind back to the present, back to awareness. She listened to see if she could hear it again. There. There it was. Cassie listened. There were the soft sounds of muffled sobbing. The girl was crying.

Cassie pulled the cover from the foot of the bed and balled it up in front of her mouth. If she could make it through the night she would face it in the morning. For the time being it was just too much.

Walter Dean Myers

Walter Dean Myers has published more than thirty novels for young adults, along with several nonfiction books and a handful of picture books, including *Brown Angels*. The list of awards these books have received is longer than the space available here. Among the most important awards Myers's books have received are the following. Seven books, including *It Ain't All for Nothin'*, *The Legend of Tarik*, and *The Glory Field*, have been named Best Books for Young Adults by the American Library Association, and *Scorpions* was one of the ALA's 100 Best of the Best Books for Young Adults published between 1967 and 1992. *Scorpions* was also a Newbery Honor Book, as was *Somewhere in the Darkness*. That book, along with *Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary*, was a Coretta Scott King Honor Book, as well as a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book. Three of Myers's novels—*Won't Know Till I Get There*, *The Outside Shot*, and *Fallen Angels*—have been *Parents' Choice* Award winners. And *Fallen Angels*, along with *The Young Landlords*, *Motown and Didi*, and *Now Is Your Time*, received the Coretta Scott King Award.

In addition to those specific awards, Myers has been the recipient of the prestigious Margaret A. Edwards

Award for his lifetime writing achievements, as well as the ALAN Award for his outstanding contributions to young adult literature.

Fallen Angels, an action-packed story of two young African American soldiers fighting in Vietnam, and *Some-where in the Darkness*, a poignant story about the relationship between a teenage boy and his convict father on a journey to understanding, are two of Walter Dean Myers's most popular novels, along with *Scorpions*, an intimate examination of the life of a young man caught up in the violence of a Harlem neighborhood gang. In his most recent novel, *Stam!*, Myers examines the life of an inner-city high-school basketball player who is trying to make something of his life.

How Do I Get Myself
Out of This?