**Between the World and Me   
Richard Wright**

And one morning while in the woods I stumbled   
    suddenly upon the thing,   
Stumbled upon it in a grassy clearing guarded by scaly   
    oaks and elms   
And the sooty details of the scene rose, thrusting   
    themselves between the world and me....

There was a design of white bones slumbering forgottenly   
    upon a cushion of ashes.   
There was a charred stump of a sapling pointing a blunt   
    finger accusingly at the sky.   
There were torn tree limbs, tiny veins of burnt leaves, and   
    a scorched coil of greasy hemp;   
A vacant shoe, an empty tie, a ripped shirt, a lonely hat,   
    and a pair of trousers stiff with black blood.   
And upon the trampled grass were buttons, dead matches,   
    butt-ends of cigars and cigarettes, peanut shells, a   
    drained gin-flask, and a whore's lipstick;   
Scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the   
    lingering smell of gasoline.   
And through the morning air the sun poured yellow   
    surprise into the eye sockets of the stony skull....

And while I stood my mind was frozen within cold pity   
    for the life that was gone.   
The ground gripped my feet and my heart was circled by   
    icy walls of fear--   
The sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the   
    grass and fumbled the leaves in the trees; the woods   
    poured forth the hungry yelping of hounds; the   
    darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the witnesses rose and lived:   
The dry bones stirred, rattled, lifted, melting themselves   
    into my bones.   
The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into   
    my flesh.

The gin-flask passed from mouth to mouth, cigars and   
    cigarettes glowed, the whore smeared lipstick red   
    upon her lips,   
And a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that   
    my life be burned....

And then they had me, stripped me, battering my teeth   
    into my throat till I swallowed my own blood.   
My voice was drowned in the roar of their voices, and my   
    black wet body slipped and rolled in their hands as   
    they bound me to the sapling.   
And my skin clung to the bubbling hot tar, falling from   
    me in limp patches.   
And the down and quills of the white feathers sank into   
    my raw flesh, and I moaned in my agony.   
Then my blood was cooled mercifully, cooled by a   
    baptism of gasoline.   
And in a blaze of red I leaped to the sky as pain rose like water, boiling my limbs   
Panting, begging I clutched childlike, clutched to the hot   
    sides of death.   
Now I am dry bones and my face a stony skull staring in   
    yellow surprise at the sun.... 