

### ***Miracle's Boys* by Jacqueline Woodson**

After Newcharlie and Aaron left, I went into the living room and turned on the television. On Friday nights Ty'ree let me watch it as much as I wanted as long as I took one weekend day for homework. I usually chose Sunday – usually starting in the late late afternoon or the minute Ty'ree started getting after me – whichever came first.

I flipped through the channels for a while, then sat back against the couch and watched music videos. I couldn't really tell one from the other. Most of them had some guy standing there rapping and a lot of pretty girls dancing around him. Or the guy was driving a fancy car with pretty girls in it. Once in a while the guy would be in a swimming pool with pretty girls. That was the one on now—a guy with a lot of rings on his fingers rapping to some pretty girls in bikinis.

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Newcharlie liked listening to music and said he was gonna be a rapper. Aaron said he was gonna be one too. Either that or a car salesman. I guess he figured he'd sell cars to rappers who would fill them with pretty girls. Thing about rapping though, Newcharlie said, is you gotta do it now. Most rappers weren't much older than him. Sometimes he and Aaron sat in our room all day long, making up rhymes and slapping each other five when something came off sounding right. But I hadn't seem them taking any real steps—like making some tapes and calling up a radio station to ask for a few minutes on the air.

I turned the volume down low. The apartment felt big and quiet with nobody in it. It's not that big—just four rooms: me and Newcharlie's room, then Ty'ree's room right next to us. His room used to be Mama's. Then there's a long hallway leading to one big room that's both the living room and the dining room. If you go right, there's a dining-room table and chairs. If you go left, there's the couch and stuff. The door to come in and out is between the couch and dining-room table. You walk through the living-room side to get to the kitchen. You have to walk through the kitchen to get to the bathroom.

Newcharlie had put plants in all the windows – spider plants and ferns and some other ones I don't know the name of. He'd learned a lot about plants at Rahway. It was strange to see him messing around with them on Saturday mornings, taking off the dead leaves

and giving them water. Sometimes he put these little sticks of plant food in the dirt. Once I even caught him *talking* to them, telling this sickly-looking fern that it better toughen up if it wanted to make it in the world.

The sun had come out again, and I watched it bounce off the plants and sprinkle itself over the dining-room table. When I closed my eyes to just a sliver, I could see Mama sitting at the table, playing with her eyebrow the way she did when she was worrying, her hair coming loose from its braid. I watched my ghost mama for a while. She looked peaceful sitting there even if she was worrying.

“Hey, Mama,” I whispered. “Can you make some chicken for dinner tonight?”

Mama looked over at me and smiled, a quiet, faraway smile. I blinked and she wasn’t there anymore.

*I got a thousand dollars in my pocket*, the guy in the rap video was saying. I leaned back against the sofa and watched him do a sort of swim-dance around the girls.

After a while, I heard Ty’ree coming up the stairs. He always whistled the same song—a song our mama used to sing to us called “Me and Bobby McGee” about a woman hitchhiking with her boyfriend in Louisiana and how free she felt whenever she played her harmonica. When Ty’ree sang the words sometimes, it made me want to get a harmonica and get out onto the road. Maybe see a sunset. Once Ty’ree took me to Central Park and we watched the sun go down over the lake my daddy got hypothermia in. It was real pretty. Pretty and sad. Most times, thought, it just sets and then it’s night and what you notice is the day and the night—not the sunset in between. On the highway you probably get all four parts—the sunrise, the day, the sunset, and the night.



**Name:****Date:**

*Please answer these questions in your own words. You may use extra paper if you need it.*

*Question #1:* Who makes the rules in Lafayette's apartment?

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*Question #2:* What does Lafayette think is surprising about Newcharlie since he came back from Rahway?

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*Question #3:* What does this passage teach you about the way Lafayette feels about his mother?

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*Question #4:* In this excerpt, Lafayette describes the dreams and aspirations of his brother and his friend, Aaron. Lafayette also has different dreams of his own. Based on this passage, what do you think Lafayette dreams of ?

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