

4.

Quiet chopped kindling. She swept, she picked from the garden and weeded, she washed clothes by hand. The aunties didn't trust her to cook.

After one morning's breakfast dishes Quiet took her place on the porch bench. When Doris laid down for her morning nap Vernita came out, handed Quiet one of two bowls, and put a bucket of rust-and-green beans between them. They sat together, snapping bean tips and peeling back the threads. Quiet ran her thumb along the velveteen hollows of a pod.

"You need to be in touch." The dull patter of Vernita's shelling continued, drowning a grasshopper's piercing seesaw.

Quiet looked out at the garden as her thumb, still a little stiff, stroked the silky trough of a shelled bean. Pyramids of dusty vines, tomatoes bright as blood, golden blotches of squash between broad and faded leaves, she could tell Vernita was looking out at the garden too, so she shook her head silently. No.
