

## Passages from Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

**The boys groped about like blind, cautious crabs**

crouching to protect their mid-sections,  
their heads pulled in short against their shoulders,  
their arms stretched nervously before them,  
with their fists testing the smoke-filled air  
like the knobbed feelers of hypersensitive snails.

In one corner

**I glimpsed a boy**

violently punching the air  
**and heard him scream in pain**  
as he smashed his hand against a ring post.

**The room spun round me,**

a swirl of lights, smoke, sweating bodies  
surrounded by tense white faces.

**I bled from both nose and mouth,**

the blood spattering upon my chest.

**Honeysuckle and purple wisteria hung heavy from the trees and  
white magnolias mixed with their scents in the bee-humming air.**

**I've recalled it often, here in my hole:**

How the grass turned green in the springtime and  
how the mocking birds fluttered their tails and sang,  
how the moon shone down on the buildings,  
how the bell in the chapel tower rang out the precious short-lived hours;  
how the girls in bright summer dresses promenaded the grassy lawn.

**The sound floats over all,**

clear like the night,  
liquid,  
serene, and  
lonely.

**I wanted to stop the car and talk with Mr. Norton,**

to beg his pardon for what he had seen;  
to plead and show him tears,  
    unashamed tears like those of a child before his parent;  
to denounce all we'd seen and heard;  
to assure him  
    that far from being like any of the people we had seen,  
        I hated them,  
    that I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and soul, and  
    that I believed in his own goodness and kindness  
        in extending the hand of his benevolence  
            to helping us poor, ignorant people out of the mire and darkness.

**I could not understand the words,**  
but only the mood, / / of the singing.  
sorrowful,  
vague and  
ethereal

Many times,  
here at night,

**I've closed my eyes and walked along the forbidden road**  
that winds past the girls' dormitories,  
past the hall with the clock in the tower,  
its windows warmly aglow,  
on down past the small white Home Economics practice cottage,  
whiter still in the moonlight, and  
on down the road with its sloping and turning,  
paralleling the black powerhouse  
with its engines droning earth-shaking rhythms in the dark,  
its windows red from the glow of the furnace,  
on to where the road became a bridge over a dry riverbed,  
tangled with brush and clinging vines;  
the bridge of rustic logs,  
made for trysting,  
but virginal  
and untested by lovers;  
on up the road,  
past the buildings,  
with the southern verandas half-a-city-block long,  
to the sudden forking,  
barren of buildings, birds, or grass,  
where the road turned off to the insane asylum.

As I drove,  
**faded and yellowed pictures of the school's early days displayed in the library flashed across the screen of my mind,**  
coming fitfully and fragmentarily to life --  
photographs of men and women in wagons drawn by mule teams and oxen,  
dressed in black, dusty clothing,  
people who seemed almost without individuality,  
a black mob that seemed to be waiting,  
looking with blank faces, and  
among them the inevitable collection of white men and women in smiles,  
clear of features,  
striking,  
elegant and  
confident.

**It throbbed with nostalgia, regret and repentance, and  
I sat with a lump in my throat**

as she sank slowly down;  
not a sitting but a controlled collapsing,  
as though she were balancing,  
sustaining the simmering bubble of her final tone  
by some delicate rhythm of her heart's blood, or  
by some mystic concentration of her being,  
focused upon the sound  
through the contained liquid of her large uplifted eyes.

### Ellisonian Sentence

I think that with the brilliant potential he has shown  
it is certain he will be a great leader of men,  
a royal king among mere princes,  
a shining star among mundane comets,  
a glittering diamond among dull stones,  
a majestic unicorn among common horses,  
a steering ship among unguided boats;  
and in his greatness he will be MAGNIFICENT!

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