

Joan Fiset

White Streak

99.44% Pure

It's late afternoon when Edna Cade runs a bath in her mint green tub. White bar of Ivory Soap between her hands she works up a lather, discerns the fragrance, scarcely there and clean. This soap will not sink; she can trust it to float.

White. Until. Whiteness remains.

When carved the rectangular bar will not splinter or crack. Her kitchen knife fashions alabaster translucence as the bar's soft texture permits small cuts: torso, legs, tail, udder, face, and ears. In the turquoise ashtray curved like a lily, slots to hold cigarettes cover over with residue of sculpting.

Bovine purity meets her eyes. No fever in the room. Her hosiery remains secure Seams straight, she casts an eye toward the kitchen. Time to think about dinner. Time to get it going.

Upon her ashen floor purity purrs upon leaving the soap. This separation from whiteness causes Edna dis-ease.

What of the other 56 one-hundredths per-cent? Impure essence she trusts to float, where does it hide, troll under the bridge, fly in the ointment, wine stain on the white Communion cloth.

Is it the scum of her bathtub ring's grimy surround she scrubs away with Ajax Foaming Cleanser?

This filmy scoria may be it, tiny fraction of clouded befoulment her unbesmirched bar contains. This whiteness without injury holds within minuscule seeds of scum she cannot know derive from talc:

In its loosest form talc is the widely-used substance known as talcum powder. It occurs as foliated to fibrous masses. Its crystals so rare as to be almost unknown; it has a perfect basal cleavage. Folia are non elastic, although slightly flexible. The softest known mineral, talc is listed as 1 on Moh's Hardness Scale. Easily scratched by a fingernail it is also sectile and can be cut with a knife. It possesses a clear or dusty luster, translucent to opaque. Not soluble in water its color ranges from white to grey or green, and has a distinctly greasy feel. Its streak is white.

An echo summons. Edna believes it possible. First Communion. White veil, dress, white stockings, and shoes.

May you always feel as close to Jesus as you do today.

Blessed by the Holy Ghost she dons her gift, St. Francis of Assisi on a chain..

Meatloaf. Tuna casserole. Salisbury Steak. Pork chops. Creamed corn. Del Monte Fruit cocktail with strawberry
Jell-O.

Purity's trusted corridor; piecrust, cake pan, Wonder Bread slices. Seamless. White as the cow almost.

No address for the envelope.

Outside snow. Over the sidewalk into next year.

Realm of kitchenette. Marbled yellow Formica. Roosters on the wallpaper. Breakfast nook. Flapjacks in the pan.

Purity attends the morning.

Sharp edges around her eyes. She remembers photographs of snowflakes in science class, her teacher far away talked about crystals, each unique as a fingerprint. Around her branches fractured. Split under the burden of too much snow. Heaviness of hands pushing down, each one expecting something different. And once in a museum the skeleton of an unborn bird still inside the egg. Part of the shell had been removed, and there it was, folded over as if in prayer, head bowed, wings still

protecting it. She wanted to place her arms around something that would welcome a single embrace, light as the sift of snow when it first began to fall. Just a dusting around the shoulders, barely there. Into the air she watched her breath lift white and disappear.

Dishes in the sink. Day darkens. Night's shadows deepen to a fairytale where Edna wanders, hums the song she's always sung below the songs her mother knew down the road should the cow come home.