



Violet Revised

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Violet Revised

I know She used to

^ That woman ^{on} lives on Lenox Avenue with her husband, a tall quiet man who works ^{ed} in a warehouse and ^{cried all the time.} cries a lot. The woman doesn't know what to do about it, the crying, but she does know why he does it: ^{sure enough} he fell for an eighteen year old girl with a love that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. The woman, her name is Violet, ^{is} furious with him because ^{same} he could forget her and love anybody else that much. She went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face, but they threw her to the floor and out of the church. She ran, then, through all that snow, back to her apartment on Lenox Avenue where she let the birds out of their cages and out the windows, including the parrot that said, "I love you." But the snow she ran through was so ^{windswept} heavy she left no footprints in it, so for a time nobody knew exactly where on Lenox Avenue she lived. But they knew who she was, who she had to be, because they knew her husband, Joe Trace, was the one who shot the girl. There ^{was never any-} is no one to prosecute him because nobody actually saw him do it, and the dead girl's aunt doesn't want to throw money to helpless lawyers or laughing cops when she knows the expense wouldn't improve anything. Besides, she ^{knew} probably knows that the man who killed her niece cries all day and for him and for Violet that is as bad as jail.

one of those
deep
spooky
loves - it

same
year

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*I don't know if
Good looking
or not*

was
She's awfully skinny, Violet, but still good looking although
have been butting fifty when she broke up the funeral.
she must ~~be way over~~ forty or so. That must be why she thought
that, even without hips or youth, she could punish Joe by getting
herself a boyfriend and letting him visit in her own house while
her husband cried in the parlour. She thought it would dry the
tears up and give her some satisfaction as well. It could have
worked, I suppose, but the children of suicides are hard to please
and quick to believe no one loves them because they are not really
here. Whether she sent the boyfriend away or whether he came to
feel that ~~the~~ *Violet gave him* Violet's rewards were ~~too~~ poor measured against his
sympathy for the heaving man in the next room, I can't say. But the
mess didn't last two weeks. Violet's next plan--to fall in love
with her husband--exhausted her before it got on a good footing.
washing his handkerchiefs and putting food on the table before him
was the most she could manage. The days of tears and *sobbing* nights of
~~silence~~ wore her down. So she decided to love--well, find out
about--the eighteen year old whose face she tried to cut open even
though nothing would have come out but straw. Violet didn't know
anything about the girl at first except her name, her former
beauty, and that she was very well liked in the beauty parlor. She
started going around gathering the rest of the information.
She questioned everybody
Everything, starting with Melvonne, an upstairs neighbor whose
apartment Joe and the girls used as a love nest. Maybe she thought
she could solve the mystery of love that way. Good luck and let
me know. From Melvonne she learned the girl's address and whose
child she was. From the beauty parlor she found out more: what

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kind of lip rouge the girl wore; saw the marcelling iron the beauticians used on her (though I suspect that girl didn't need to straighten her hair); listened to the band the girl liked best (Slim Bates' Ebony Keys which is pretty good except for his vocalist); and when she was shown how, she did the dance steps the girl used to do. All that. But when she had the steps down pat--her knees just so--~~everybody~~ in her building got disgusted with her. It was like watching an old street pigeon pecking ~~the remains~~ of a sardine sandwich the cats had left behind. But Violet ~~is~~ ^{was} nothing but persistent and no crack or ugly-eyed look stops ^{ed} her. She haunted PS12 to talk to teachers who knew the girl. De Witt Clinton High School too, because the girl had quit there in the eleventh grade. And for a long time she pestered the girl's aunt, a lonesome woman who works as a seamstress in the garment district, until the aunt broke down and began talking to relieve her own sorrow. ^{Soon} ~~Then~~ she began to look forward to Violet's visits for a chat about youth and ~~love~~ and misbehavior. The aunt showed Violet all the dead girl's things and it ^{to Violet} ~~became~~ ^{was} clear that ^{this} ~~her~~ niece had been hard-headed as well as pretty. One particular thing the aunt showed her, and eventually let Violet keep for a few weeks, was a picture of the girl's face. Not smiling, but alive at least and very bold. Violet had the nerve to put it on the fireplace mantle in her own parlour and both she and Joe looked at it and cried--for the same reasons: to hang on to what they had lost.

It promised to be a mighty bleak household, what with the birds gone and the two of them wiping their cheeks all day, but

(right woman's
under glee
a book by III, not purple)

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when spring came to the city Violet saw ,coming into the building with an OKEH record under her arm and carrying some stewmeat wrapped in butcher paper, another girl with four marcelled waves on each side of her head. Violet invited her in to hear the record and that is how that unlikely threesome on Lenox Avenue began. What turned out different was who shot whom.

(Whatever you hear tell, I say)

in 1920s. It

?
In those days the City wasn't so sure of itself and was looking around at the world instead of its own face. It was a port, after all, surrounded by deep water to cross over if you wanted to get in or out. So it stared up at the sky, looked down into its deep waters and worked its loud harbors without a touch of smugness. What went on in its streets and neighborhoods was anything the strong could think of and the weak could admire. Armistice was half a dozen years old the winter when Violet disrupted the funeral, and veterans on Lenox Avenue wore their army issue greatcoats, because nothing they could pay for was as sturdy or hid so well what they could not boast of. When snow came, it sat where it fell on Lexington and Park Avenue too, and waited for horse drawn wagons to tamp it down when they delivered coal for the furnaces cooling down in the cellars. Up in the apartments and between the stone houses people knocked on each others doors to see if anything was needed or could be had. A bar of soap? A little kerosene? Some fat, chicken or pork, to brace the soup one more time? Whose husband was getting ready to go to the store with a

list drawn up by the wives? And if there were problems [tk] they put up with them because it was worth anything to be on Lenox Avenue where the sidewalks, snow-covered or not, were wider than the main roads of the towns where they were born and perfectly ordinary people could stand at the stop, get on the streetcar, give the man the nickel, and ride anywhere you damned well pleased, although you didn't please to go many places because everything you wanted was right where you were: the church, the store, the party, the women, the men, the postbox (but no high schools, no hospital), the furniture store, street newspaper vendors, the bootleg houses (but no banks), the beauty parlors, the barber shops, the pool halls, the open food markets, the number runner, and every club, organization, group, order, union, society, brotherhood, sisterhood, or association imaginable. The City was not citified then. It was a clutch of islands, sporting villages (called neighborhoods) cheek and jowl, with unencumbered, if infrequent, trespass among them. The service trails, of course, were worn, and there were paths that got slick from the foray of villagers into the territory of another where it was believed something curious or thrilling lay. Some gleaming, cracking scarey stuff. Where you could pop the cork and put the cold glass mouth right up to your own. Knock any sort of danger away with another and laugh at the knife when it missed and when it didn't. It would make you wonderful just to see it. And just as wonderful to know that back in one's own building there were lists drawn up by the wives to give to the husband braving the snow to get to an open market, and

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that sheets impossible to hang out ~~to dry~~ in snowfall draped
kitchens like the (wings of ~~angels~~ drowned at sea.) X

The young were not so young then, and there was no such thing as mid-life. Sixty years, forty, even, was as much as anybody felt like being bothered with. If they reached that, they sat around looking at goings on as though it were a five cent triple feature on Saturday. Otherwise they found themselves butting in the business of people whose names they couldn't remember and whose business was none of theirs. Just to hear themselves talk and the joy of watching the distressed faces of those listening. There were some exceptions. Some of those, born elsewhere, probably, somewhere other than the City, some green place where the sound of birds were enough to keep you going. Those old people had good news to tell the young and each other. They didn't slap the children for being slappable; they saved that strength in case it was needed for something important. A last courtship full of smiles and little presents. Or the dedicated care of an old friend who might not make it through without them. Sometimes just making sure the person they had shared their long lives with had cheerful company and the necessary things for the night.