



Malvonne

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July 5, 1990

Malvonne

Malvonne lived alone ^{NW} with newspapers and other people's stories printed in small books. When she was not making her office building sparkle, she was melding the print stories with her keen observation of the people around her. Very little escaped the woman who rode the trolley against traffic at six p.m.; who examined the trash baskets of powerful whitemen, looked at photographs of women and children on their desks. Heard their hallway conversation, and the bathroom laughter penetrating the broom closet like fumes from her bottle of ammonia. ^{She} Re-situated their bottles and flasks tucked under cushions and behind books whose words were printed in two columns. She knew who had a passion for justice as well as ladies undergarments, who loved his wife and who shared one. The one who fought with his son and would not speak to his father. For they did not cover the mouthpiece when they talked on the telephone to ask her to leave as she inched her way down the halls, into their offices, nor did they drop their voices to a confidential whisper when they worked late doing what they called the 'real' business.

But Malvonne was not interested in them; she simply noticed. Her interest lay in ^{the} neighborhood people.

let him visit in her own house while her husband cried. She thought it would shake the tears off and give her some satisfaction as well. It worked for a while, but the children of suicides are had to please and quick to believe no one loves them because they are not really here. She sent the boyfriend away. Her next plan -to fall in love with her husband, exhausted her before it got on a good footing. 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. She didn't know anything about her except her address, her former beauty, and that she was very well liked in the beauty parlor . She started going around getting all the information she could on her. Everything. Maybe she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way. Good luck and let me know. She found out what kind of lipstick she wore; the marcelling iron the beauticians used on her (though I seem to remember 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 did the dance steps she did. All that. But when she had the steps down pat, her knees just so everybody in the building got disgusted with her. It was like watching a gull pecking the remains of a soft shell crab some other bird dropped. But Violet is nothing but persistent and no crack or ugly-eyed look stops her. She haunted PS 12 to talk to teachers who knew the girl. Clinton School too, because the girl had dropped out from there in the eleventh grade. She fought a long time with the girl's aunt, a lonesome woman who works

as a seamstress in the garment district, broke down and began talking , mostly to relieve her own sorrow then started looking forward to a chat about youth and love and goodness--all the things neither one of them knew a thing about. The aunt showed Violet all the dead girl's things and it became clear that her niece had been sweet as well as pretty. One particular thing the aunt showed her, and eventually let her keep for a few weeks, was a picture of the girl's face. Smiling. That woman Violet had the nerve to put it on her own mantelpiece in her own parlor and both she and her husband looked at it and cried--for different things though. He c ried for his lost love; she cried because she wasn't eighteen anymore and no one could follow in her tracks.

Then one day she saw her--the dead girl--coming into this building with an OKEH record under her arm and some stewmeat wrapped in butcher paper. Violet's mouth flew open and she fanned her hand as if moving thin thready things out of her line of vision. She stopped the girl--who looked exactly like the one Violet's husband killed, down to the four marcelled waves on each side of her head. She invited her in to hear the record and that is how this threesome in our building began. What is different this time is who killed whom.