



## Violet/2 revised

---

No Known Copyright

Princeton University Library reasonably believes that the Item is not restricted by copyright or related rights, but a conclusive determination could not be made.

You are free to use this Item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.

## Princeton University Library Disclaimer

---

Princeton University Library claims no copyright governing this digital resource. It is provided for free, on a non-commercial, open-access basis, for fair-use academic and research purposes only. Anyone who claims copyright over any part of these resources and feels that they should not be presented in this manner is invited to contact Princeton University Library, who will in turn consider such concerns and make every effort to respond appropriately. We request that users reproducing this resource cite it according the guidelines described at <http://rbcs.princeton.edu/policies/forms-citation>.

## Citation Information

---

Morrison, Toni. 1931-

Violet/2 revised

1 folder (partial)

## Contact Information

---

## Download Information

---

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 12:45:29 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/hq37vt15j>

July 13, 1989  
Violet/2 revised

Vio/2

She sat there sucking malt through a straw wondering who on earth this Violet was that walked about town in her skin; peeped out through her eyes and saw other things: some things dimmer, shadowey--other things clear and much too big. The one that knew the knife was in the parrot's cage and not in the kitchen drawer; who remembered what she did not: scraping marble from the parrot's claws and beak weeks ago. She had been looking for that knife for a month. Couldn't for the life of her think what she'd done with it. But this Violet knew and went right to it. Knew, too, where the funeral was going on, although it could not have been but one of two places[tk and tk] come to think of it. Still that Violet knew which of the two, and the right time to get there. Just before the closing of the casket, when the people who were going to faint fainted and the women in white dresses were fanning them. And the ushers, young men same age as the deceased--from her high school class, with freshly barbed heads and ghost white gloves--gathered first in a tight knot of six and then separated into two lines of three, moved down the aisle from the back where they had assembled and surrounded the bier. They were the ones that that Violet had to push aside, elbow her way into. And they did. Step aside, thinking maybe this was some last minute love desperate to



make itself known before it couldn't see and might forget the sleeping face it treasured. They saw the knife before she did. Before she knew what was going on, the ushers' hard hands--knuckle-tough from marbles and steelies, from snowballs packed to bullet strength, from years of sticks sending hardballs over the hoods of cars, into lots with high fences and even into the open windows as well as the closed of people living four floors up, hands that had held the boy's whole body weight from the iron railings of the [tk] bridge let alone the monkey bars in [tk] park--these hands were reaching toward the blade she had not seen for a month at least and was surprised to see now aimed at the girl's sweet and secret face.

It bounced off, making a little dent under her ear lobe, like a fold in the skin that was hardly a disfigurement at all. She could have left it at that: the fold under the ear lobe, but that Violet wasn't satisfied. She fought with the hard handed usher boys and was time enough for them, almost. They had to forget right away that this was a fifty-some year old woman in a fur collared coat and a hat pulled down so far over her right eye, it was a wonder she saw the door to the church not to speak of the right place to aim her knife. They had to abandon the teachings they had had all their lives about the respect due their elders, the old folks whose milky light eyes watched every thing they did, commented on it, and told each other what it was; the younger old folks (like her) who could be their auntie, their grandmother,

their mother, or their mother's best friend who not only could tell on them, but could tell them; could stop them cold with a word, with a "Cut that mess out!" shouted from any window, doorway or streetcurb in a two block radius. And they would cut it out, or take it downstairs, behind the boiler, or off in [tk] park, or better still, in the shadow of the el where no lights lit what these women did not allow, don't care whose child it was. But they did it. Forgot the lessons of a lifetime, and concentrated on the wide, shining blade, because who knew? Maybe she had others in mind. Or maybe they could see themselves hang dog at the dinner table trying to explain to these same women or even, Jesus! the men, the fathers and uncles, and grown cousins, friends and neighbors, why they had just stood there like street lights and let this woman in a fur collared coat make fools of them and ruin the honorable job they had worn white gloves for. They had to wrestle her to the floor before she let go. And the sound that came from her mouth belonged to something wearing a pelt instead of a coat.

"Get away," she told him. "Go on off somewhere!"

By then they were joined by frowning men who carried the kicking, growling Violet out while she looked on in amazement. She had not been that strong since Virginia, since she loaded hay and handled the mule cart with a four lead rein. But [tk] years in the city had softened her arms and melted the shield that once covered her palms and fingers. Like shoes taking away the tough leather her bare feet had grown, the city took away the back and arm power she



July 13, 1989  
Violet/2 revised

4

used to boast of. A power that Violet had not lost because she gave the usher boys and the grown men too a serious time.

She should not have let the parrot go. He forgot how to fly and just stood on the sill all that day and when she came back alone from the funeral, having been practically thrown out by the hard-handed boys and the frowning men, it was still there. She tried not to look at it when she climbed the steps to the door, but he saw her and said the last thing she wanted to hear: "Love you." Joe did not come home that night or the next, so she knew the parrot was there because she kept going up and down the stairs from her apartment door to the front door to see if he was coming down the street or was sitting on the stoop. At two in the morning, again at four, she made the trip, peered out into the dark street, solitary except for a pair of police and cats peeing in the snow. The parrot, shivering and barely turning his green and blonde head, told her each time "Love you."

"Get away," she told him. "Go on off somewhere!"

The second morning he had. All she saw, down in the dark cellar well beneath the stoop, was a light yellow feather with a tip of green. And she had never named him. Had called him "my parrot" all these years. "My parrot." "Love you." "Love you." Did the dogs get him? Did some night-walking man snatch him up and take him to a house that did not feature mirrors or keep a supply of ginger cookies? Or did he get the message--that she said "My

July 13, 1989  
Violet/2 revised

5

parrot" and he said "Love you." and she had never said it back or even took the trouble to name him--and manage somehow to fly away on wings that had not soared for six years. Wings grown stiff from disuse and dull in the bulb light of an apartment with no view to speak of. ~~boss handkerchiefs were not lightweight cotton~~

~~pink~~ The malted was gone and although her stomach seemed about to lose its stitching, she ordered another and took it over to one of the little tables next to the [tk] that Duggie had placed there against the law that said if he did it , it made the place a restaurant. There she could sit and watch the foam disappear, the scoops of ice cream lose their ridges and turn to soft, glistening balls like soap bars left in a dishpan full of water. She had meant to bring a package of [tk Ovaltine?] to stir into the malted milk shake, because they didn't seem to be doing any good. The hips she came here with were gone too, just like the power in her back and arms. Maybe that Violet who knew where the butcher knife was and was strong enough to use it had the hips she had lost. But if she was strong and had hips, why was she proud of trying to kill a dead girl, and she was proud. Whenever she thought about that Violet, and what that Violet saw through her own eyes, she knew there was no shame there, no disgust. That was hers alone, so she hid behind the [tk] at one of Duggie's little illegal tables and played with the straw in a chocolate malt. She could have been eighteen herself, just like the girl, reading [tk magazine] and playing at drinking malts in the drug store. Did she like [tk



magazine]? did the blonde ladies with winged hair capture her? Did the men in golf shoes, and V-neck sweaters? How could they if she found herself stuck on a man old enough to be her father. A man who carried not a golf club, but a sample case of Lucky Heart products. A man whose handkerchiefs were not lightweight cotton poking from his jacket pocket, but red and large and spotted with white dots. Did he ask her to warm with her own body his spot in the bed on cold winter nights before he slid in? Or did he do it for her? He probably let her put her spoon into his pint of cream and scoop off the melty part, and when they sat in the dark of the [tk theater] he wouldn't mind a bit if she stuck her hand down in his box of popcorn and came up with a fistful of it the sonofabit-ch. And when "Wings Over Jordan" came on he probably turned the volume down so he could hear her when she sang along with the choir, instead of up so as to drown out her rendition of [tk]. Turned, too, his jaw to the light of the bulb so she could press out between her thumb nails the hair root caught in a pore the dog. And another damn thing. The malt was soup now, smooth and cold. The twenty-five dollar bonus prize of a blue shaded boudioren lamp or an orchid colored satin-like ladies robe that he won and was due to him for having sold all that merchandise in one month--he gave to her the heifer. And took her to Indigo on Saturday and sat way back so they could hear the music wide and be in the dark at the same time, at one of those round tables with a slick black top and a tablecloth of pure white on it, drinking rough gin with that

July 13, 1989  
Violet/2 revised

7

sweet red stuff in it so it looked like soda pop, which a girl like her ought to have ordered instead of liquor she could sip from the edge of a glass wider at the mouth than at its base, with a tiny stem like a flower in between while her hand, the one that wasn't holding the glass shaped like a flower, was under the table drumming out the rhythm on the inside of his thigh, his thigh, his thigh, thigh, thigh, and he bought her underwear with stitching done to look like rosebuds and violets, VIOLETS, don't you know, and she wore it for him thin as it was and too cold for a room that couldn't count on a radiator to work through the night, the night while I was where? where? [tk] Whereever it was, it was cold and I was cold and nobody had got into the bedsheets early to warm up a spot for me or reached around my shoulders to pull the quilt up under my neck or even my ears because it got that cold sometimes it did and maybe that is why the butcher knife struck the neckline just by the ear lobe. That's why . And that's why it took so much wrestling to get me down, keep me down and out of that coffin where she was the heifer who took what was mine, what I chose, picked out and determined to have and hold on to no that Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit that Violet is me. The me that hauled hay in virginia and handled a four mule team in the brace. I have stood in cane fields in the middle of the night when the sound of it rustling hid the slither of the snakes and I stood still waiting for him and not stirring a speck in case he was near and I would



July 13, 1989  
Violet/2 revised

8

miss him, and damn the snakes my man was coming for me and who or what was going to keep me from him? Plenty times, plenty times I have carried the welts given me by a two tone peckerwood because I was late in the fieldrow the next morning. Plenty times, plenty, I chopped twice the wood that was needed into short logs and kindlin so as to make sure Mr. [tk] had enough and wouldn't go hollering for me when I was bound to meet my Joe Trace don't care what, and do what you will or may. He was my Joe Trace. Mine. I picked him out from all the others wasn't nobody like Joe he make anybody stand in cane in the middle of the night; make any woman dream about him in the daytime so hard she miss the rut and have to work hard to get the mules back on the track. Any woman, not just me. Maybe that is what she saw. Not the fifty year old man toting a sample case, but my Joe Trace, my Virginia Joe Trace who carried a light inside him, whose shoulders were razor sharp and who looked at me and never saw anybody else. Could she have looked at him now and seen that? Under the table at the Indigo was she drumming on a thigh soft as a baby's but feeling all the while the way it used to be skin so tight it almost split and let the iron muscle through? Did she feel that, know that? That and other things, things I should have known and didn't? Secret things kept hidden from me or didn't notice? Is that why he let her scoop the melty part from around the edges of his pint of ice cream, stick her hand down in his salt and butter popcorn. What did she see, young girl like that, barely out of high school, with unbraided

hair, lip rouge for the first time and high heeled shoes. And also what did he? A young me with high yellow skin instead of black? A young me with long wavey hair instead of nappy? Or a not me at all. A me he was loving in Virginia because that girl Dorcus wasn't around there anywhere. Was that it? Who was it? Who was he thinking of when he ran in the dark to meet me in the cane field? Somebody golden, like my own Golden Gray, who I never ever saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers? Help me god help me if that was it, because I knew him and loved him better than anybody except True Belle who is the one made me crazy about him in the first place. Is that what happened? Standing in the cane, he was trying to catch a girl he was yet to see, but his heart knew all about, and me, holding on to him but wishing he was the Golden Gray I never saw either. Which means from the very beginning I was a substitute and so was he.

Sitting in the thin sharp light of the drugstore playing with a long spoon in a tall glass made her think of another woman occupying herself at a table pretending to drink from a cup. Her mother. Precisely what Violet had determined to avoid. She didn't ever want to sit at the table, alone in the moonlight, sipping boiled coffee as long as it was there, and pretending to sip it when it was all gone; waiting for morning when men came, talking low as though nobody was there but themselves, and picked around in our things, lifting out what they wanted--what was theirs, they said, although we cooked in it, washed sheets in it, sat on it, ate



July 13, 1989  
Violet/2 revised

10

off of it. That was after they had hauled away the plow, the scythe, the mule, the sow, the churn and the butter press. Then they came inside the house and all of us children put one foot on the other and watched. When they got to the table where our mother sat nursing an empty cup, they took the table out from under her and then, while she sat there alone, and all by herself like, cup in hand, they come back and tap the chair she sat in. She didn't jump up right away, so they shook it a bit and since she still stayed seated--looking ahead at no one--they just tipped her out of it like the way you get the cat off the seat if you don't want to touch it, or pick it up in your arms. You tip it forward and it lands on the floor. No harm done if it's a cat because it has four legs. But a person, a woman, might fall forward and just stay there a minute looking at the cup, stronger than she is, unbroken lying a bit beyond her hand. Just out of reach.

There were five of them, Violet the third, and they all came in the house finally and said mama; each one came and said it until she said uh huh. They never heard her say anything else in the days that followed, when neighbors brought things: a pallet, a pot, some pan bread and a bucket of milk. Advice too: "Don't let this whip you, Rose. You got us, Rose. Think of the young ones, Rose. He ain't give you nothing you can't bear, Rose." But had He? Maybe this one time He had. Had misjudged and misunderstood her particular back bone. This one time. This here particular spine.

Committed as Violet was to hip development, even she couldn't

July 13, 1989  
Violet/2 revised

11

drink the remaining malt--watery, warm and flat tasting. She buttoned her coat and left the drugstore not noticing that it was spring. In the city.

From the frame, is the split to nail back. The gray hair of her first visitor, murmuring in the old lady's stream of confidence. Violet is re-situating the card that holds the over door to its hinge and rehearsing this week's plan for three more days to the next collector. She thinks she longs for rest, a carefree afternoon to decide whether to go to the pictures, or just to sit with the birds and listen to the whistler in the street below. This notion of rest, is attractive to her, but I don't think she would like it. They are all like that, these women, waiting for the card, the space that need not be filled with anything other than the drift of their own thoughts. But they wouldn't like it. They are busy and thinking of ways to be busier. The space of nothing pressing to do would knock them down. The slide of coverlip will rush into that opening, not carrying the heat and light the light is shy. No. Not at all. They fill their time and hands with soap and repair and dicey confrontations. Because what is waiting for them, in even a suddenly idle moment, is the weeping they have not done. The rage. Holten. Thick and slow moving. Mindful and particular about what in its path it chooses to bury.

Or else, into a host of time, sideways, slips a sorrow they