



Draft: Jazz; Violet

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Rose jumped into the well and missed all the fun ~~that came~~ ^{after her burial} two weeks ~~later~~ ^{when her husband arrived} when her husband returned loaded with ingots of gold

for the children, two-dollar pieces for the women and snake oil for ^{the}

me. For Rose he brought ^t a silk embroidered pillow to cushion ^h her

back on a sofa no one ever had but would have been real nice under

Rose's head in the pine box--if only he'd been on time. The

children ate the chocolate ^{centers} from the ingots of gold and traded the

^{heavenly} paper among themselves for reed whistles and fishing string. The

women bit the ^{peice} of silver before ^{knocking} wrapping it tightly in their

clothes. Except True Belle. She fingered the money and, looking

^{back and forth} from the coin to her son-in-law, shook her head and laughed.

"Damn," he said, ^{An} "damn," when he ^g head what Rose had done.

^{Twenty-one days} ~~Two weeks~~ later he was gone again, and Violet was married to

Joe and living in New York when she heard from her sister that

he'd done it again: arrived with treasures weighing his pockets and

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folded under the cap on his head.

He made several such appearances over the years, although the
interims got longer and longer, and while the likelihood that he
was still alive grew fainter, hope never did. Any day, any day--
on another brittle cold Mondy or in the blasting heat of another
Sunday afternoon, he might be there, hollering from the road,
dollar bills sticking from his hat, jammed into the cuffs of his
pants {trousers}. Candy stuck in clumps in his coat pocket. Bottles of rye and [brand name cologne and medicine] clinking in
a worn carpet bag.

and the tops of his shoes.
along with a few of Egyptian Frieda's hair pomade.
purgative waters, and eaux for every conceivable toilet
would strike
made
made a Companionable clink
Compan

He'd be in his seventies now. slower for sure, and maybe he'd
lost [tk]. But in Violet's mind (as well as the minds of those
who stayed in x), he was out there somewhere gathering and putting
by delights to pass out among the homefolks, for who could keep him
down this irregular birthday man who *everyday* *dispensed* ~~came bearing~~ gifts and stories
that kept ~~you~~ *her* so rapt ~~you~~ *she* forgot for the while a bone-clean
them *they*

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^{tossed}
~~shattered~~ her before running off promising to return and bounce her
again^g like an India rubber ball. Or was it that chair they tipped
her out of? Did she fall on the floor and sit there dedding then ^{right}
that she would do it? ^{Someday.} Delaying it for x years while True Belle
came and took over but remembering it as a door, closed and locked,
with pointless hours and days on the other side? Biding her time
until the moment returnedⁱ with all its mewing hurt ^{or} and overborad²
rageⁱ_m and she would turn away from the door to step toward the
limitlessness beckoning from the well. What could it have been to
make a mother lose sight of her children.

True Belle was there, chuckling, ^mcopetant, stitching by
firelight, gardening and harvesting by day. Pouring x tea on the
little girls cuts and bruises, and keeping them at their tasks with
spell binding tales of her Baltimore days and the child she had
cared for there. Maybe it was that : knowing her ^{daughters} girls were in
good hands, better hand^s than her own, at last, and Rose was free of

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time that no longer flowed, but stood ^stock still when they tipped her from her kitchen chair. So she went to the forbidden well ^{asid} missed all the fun.

Violet could neither stay nor go. The well sucked at her dreams, but the notion of leaving frightened her. True Belle ^{it} was ^{who} ~~she~~ forced it. There were bully x crops in X and people for ²⁰ ~~x~~ miles ^{around} were going to pick it. Rumor was ^g ~~they~~ pay was ten cents for young women, a quarter for me. ^{in a row} Three double seasons of bad weather had ruined ~~everybody's~~ expectations and then came the day when the blossoms jumped out fat and creamy. Everybody held his breath while the owner squinted his eyes and spat. Two laborers {x and x} walked the rows, touching the tender flowers, fingering the soil and trying to puzzle out the sky. Then ^{four} ~~three~~ days of sweet rain ^g and all of x was downy with the cleanest cotton they'd ^g ~~every~~ seen. Softer than silk, and out so fast the weevil's, having

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abandoned the fields two years ago, had no time to get back there.

Three weeks. It all had to be done in three weeks or less. Everybody with ^gthree fingers showed up and was hired on the spot. X\$ a bale some said, if you grew your own; X\$ if you had a whitefriend to carry it up for pricing. And for pickers, ten cents a day for the women and a case quarter for the men.

True Belle sent Violet and ^gwith two of her sister^s, in the fourth wagon load to go. They assembled at ^{down}down, ate what was handed out , and shared the meadows ^{and}adn ~~their~~ stars with local people who saw no point in going all the way home for five hours sleep.

Violet had no gift for it. She was 19? years old but trailed with the twelve years olds--making up the last in line or meeting the others on their way back down the row. For this she was put to scragging, second picking the bushes that had[/]a few inferior ^{ff}pugs left on the ^Ptwings by swifter hands than hers. Humiliated,

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teased to tears, she had about decided to be^j a way back to X when

a man fell out of the tree above her head and landing^{ed} at her side.

^She had lain down on^e night , sulking and abashed, ~~one night~~, a

little way from her sisters, but not too far. Not too far to crawl

back to them swiftly if the x trees turned out to be full of

spirits idling the night away. The spot she had chosen to speard^{head}

her blanket^(?) was under a handsome x that grew away from the woods

next to the meadow strip bordering the acres of cotton.

The thump could not have been a raccoon's because it groaned
~~and~~ said ow! Violet rolled away too frightened to speak, but
raised on all fours to dash.

"Never happened before," said the man. "I've been sleeping
up there every night. This the first time I fell out."

Violet could see ^his outline in a sitting position and that he
was rubbing his arm then his head then his arm again.

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"If I find me a good one."

"Nobody sleeps in trees."

"I sleep in them."

"Sounds soft-headed to me. Could be snakes up there."

"Snakes crawl the ground at night. Now, who's soft-headed?"

"Could've killed me."

"Might still, if my arm aint broke."

"I hope it is. You won't be pcking nothing in the morning and climbing people's trees either."

"I don't pick cotton. I work the gin."

"What you ding out here, then, Mr. High and Mighty sleeping in trees like a bat?"

"You don't have one nice word for a hurt man?"

"Yeah. Find somebody else's tree."

"You act like you own it."

"You act like you do."

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"Say we share it."

"Not me."

He stood up and shook his leg before trying his weight on it.

Then
He limped toward the tree.

"You not going back up there over my head."

"Get my tarp," he said. "Rope broke. *that's* what did it."

He *s*anned the far reaches of the branches. "Think I see it.

Hanging right there. Yep." He sat down then, his back resting on the trunk. "Have to wait til it's light, though," he said and

Violet always believed *that* because *their* first conversation began in the dark, *(*when neither could see much more of the other than silhouette,*)* and ended in a green and white dawn, that night time *was* ~~would never be~~ the same for her. Never again would she wake,

struggling against the pull of a black well. Or watch first light with the sadness left over *from fending* ~~from fending~~ Rose in the morning twisted into space much too small.

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His name was Joseph and even before the sun rose[?], when it was stil hidden in the woods, but fresh^{en}ing the world's green and making acres of white cotton ^{dazzle}~~distinguish~~ ^{against}~~themselves from~~ the gash of a ruby horizon, Violet claimed him. Hadn't he fallen practically in her lap? Hadn't he stayed? ^{all} through the night, taking her sass, complain^{ing}, teasing, explaining, but ^{talk}ing, talking her through the night? And with daylight came other bits: his smile and his wide watching eyes. His botton less shirt open to a knot at the waist exposed a chest she claimed as her own smooth pillow[?] The shaft of his legs, the plane of his shoulders, jawline and long fingers--she claimed it all.

She thought she must be staring, and tried to look away, but the music in his voice brought her eyes back each and every time. She grew angry when others began to stir, anticipating the breakfast call, going off in the trees to relieve themselves, muttering morning sounds--but then he said, "I'll be back in our

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tree tonight. Where you be?"

"Under it," she said and rose from the clover like a woman with important things to do.

She didn't even worry what would happen in three weeks ~~when~~ she was supposed to take her two dollars and ten cents back to True Belle. As it turned out, she sent it back with her sisters and stayed in the vicinity working x. The straw boss had no faith in her, having watched her working hard to fill her sack as quickly as the children, but she was highly and suddenly vocal in her determination. She lived with a family of six in x and worked x to be with Joe whenever she could. And he, a sometime hunter who lived with an adopted family, worked gins and lumber and cane and cotton and corn who butchered when needed, plowed, fished , sold skins and game--waswilling. He loved the woods, Loved them. So it was shocking to his family and friends when he agreed not to marry Violet, but to accompany her to Baltimore where she said all

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the houses had separate roooms and ~~where~~ water came to you--not you
to it. ~~where~~ colored men worked harbors for x\$ a day, pulling
cargo from ~~white~~ ships bigger than churches?) and others drove up
to the very door of your house to take you where you needed to be.
She was describing a Baltimore of twenty-five years ago and a
neighborhood neither she nor Joe could rent int^g, but she didn't
know that, and never knew it, because they went to New York City
instead. Their Balitmore dreams were displaced by more po^werful
ones. Joe knew people living in New York and some who'd been ~~ather~~^e
and come home with tales to make Baltimore weep. The money to be
earned for doing light work--stanin^g in front of a door, carrying
food on a tray, even cleaning stranger's shoes got you in a day
more money than any of them had earned in one whole harvest.
Whitepeople literally threw money at you--just for being
neighborly: opening a taxi door, picking up a package. And
anything made yo^u could sell in the streets. In fact, there were

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streets where colored people owned all the stores; whole blocks of handsome colored men and women laughing all night and making money all day. Steel cars sped down the streets and if you saved up ^{they said} you could get you one and drive as long as there was road.

^{Suddenly} Something mesmerized Joe, angered him in a way, and permitted him to leave his field ^{and} woods and secret lonely valleys. ^{To} give away his fishing pole, his skinning knife--every piece of his gear but one, and borrow a suitcase for their things, ^{He took} take his bride on a train ride exciting enough ^{to} to break both their hearts.

Violet thought the city would disappoint them; ^{that} it would be less lovely than Baltimore. Joe believed it would be perfect. When they arrived, carrying all of their belongings ^{on a trip} in one valise, they both knew perfect was not the word. ^I It was better than that.